

4481. C. 37
S E R M O N S

PREACHED BEFORE THE
UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE.

BY JAMES FAWCETT, B.D.
FELLOW OF SAINT JOHN'S COLLEGE, AND
LADY MARGARET'S PREACHER.

C A M B R I D G E :

PRINTED BY J. ARCHDEACON AND J. BURGESS,
PRINTERS TO THE UNIVERSITY;

FOR J. & J. MERRILL, IN CAMBRIDGE; T. CADELL,
STRAND, B. & J. WHITE, IN FLEET STREET,
W. RICHARDSON, ROYAL EXCHANGE, G. & T.
WILKIE, AND T. EVANS, NO. 46. AND J.
EVANS, NO. 32. PATER-NOSTER ROW,
R. FAULDER, NEW BOND STREET, AND
J. DEIGHTON, HOLBORN, LONDON,

MDCCXCIV.

CONTENTS



THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA LIBRARY

BERKELEY, CALIFORNIA

1911

1912

1913

1914

1915

C O N T E N T S.

S E R M O N I.

The connection between the internal evidence of religion and its external proofs.

DEUT. xiii. 1, 2, 3.

If there arise among you a prophet, or a dreamer of dreams, and giveth thee a sign or a wonder :

And the sign or the wonder come to pass, whereof he spake unto thee, saying, Let us go after other gods, which thou hast not known, and serve them :

Thou shalt not hearken unto the words of that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams : for the Lord your God proveth you, to know

*whether you love the Lord your God with
all your heart, and with all your soul.*

S E R M O N Page 1.

S E R M O N II.

*The Jewish dispensation preparatory to
the Christian.*

GAL. iii. 24.

*Wherefore the Law was our School-master,
to bring us unto Christ. P. 27.*

S E R M O N III.

*The evidence in favour of Christianity,
which is derived from the prophecies
delivered by Jesus Christ.*

LUKE xxiv. 19.

*Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, which was
a prophet mighty in deed and word before
God and all the people. P. 59.*

S E R M O N

(v)

S E R M O N I V.

The evidences of Christianity sufficient.

Preached on Easter-Day.

LUKE xvi. 31.

*If they bear not Moses and the prophets,
neither will they be persuaded, though
one rose from the dead.* P. 87.

S E R M O N V.

The effects of Christianity beneficial.

Preached on the fifth of November.

MATTH. x. 34.

*Think not that I am come to send peace on
earth; I came not to send peace but a
sword.* P. 117.

S E R M O N

(vi)

S E R M O N VI.

Preached on Whitsunday.

1 COR. ii. 16.

*Who hath known the mind of the Lord, that
he may instruct him? But we have the
mind of Christ.*

P. 143.

S E R M O N VII.

The Redemption of man universal.

Preached on Good-Friday.

1 COR. xv. 22.

*As in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall
all be made alive.*

P. 165.

S E R M O N VIII.

The excellence and importance of the holy
scriptures.

2 Tim. iii. 15.

*And that from a child thou hast known the
holy scriptures, which are able to make thee
wise unto salvation.*

P. 191.

S E R M O N

(vii)

S E R M O N IX.

The vices of Christians detrimental to the
general interests of Religion.

I PET. ii. 15.

*For so is the will of God, that with well
doing ye may put to silence the ignorance
of foolish men.*

P. 213.

S E R M O N X.

On the duty of example in matters of
indifference.

I THESS. v. 22.

Abstain from all appearance of evil.

P. 235.

S E R M O N XI.

On the government of the thoughts.

PROV. iv. 23.

*Keep thine heart with all diligence, for out
of it are the issues of life.*

P. 257.

S E R M O N

S E R M O N XII.

On the commission of small faults.

MATTH. xxiii. 23.

*These things ought ye to have done, and not
to leave the other undone.* P. 281.

S E R M O N XIII.

The danger of assuming the appearance
of vice.

ROM. xii. 2.

Be not conformed to this world. P. 305.

S E R M O N XIV.

Preached January 27, 1793.

ROM. iii. 8.

*And not rather as we be slanderously report-
ed, and as some affirm that we say, Let
us do evil that good may come.* P. 327.

DEUT. xiii. 1, 2, 3.

IF THERE ARISE AMONG YOU A PROPHET,
OR A DREAMER OF DREAMS, AND GIVETH
THEE A SIGN OR A WONDER;

AND THE SIGN OR THE WONDER COME TO
PASS, WHEREOF HE SPAKE UNTO THEE,
SAYING, 'LET US GO AFTER OTHER GODS,
WHICH THOU HAST NOT KNOWN, AND
SERVE THEM;

THOU SHALT NOT HEARKEN UNTO THE
WORDS OF THAT PROPHET, OR THAT
DREAMER OF DREAMS: FOR THE LORD
YOUR GOD PROVETH YOU, TO KNOW
WHETHER YOU LOVE THE LORD YOUR
GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH
ALL YOUR SOUL.

TO assist the natural weakness of
man, and correct his acquired
depravity, is the avowed object of all re-
velations, whether real or pretended: and

A

as

as their end is thus important, we shall not be surpris'd, that the most extraordinary methods have been employed, to guard against the obtrusion of those which are false, and to secure the admittance of those which are true. In the earlier ages of the world indeed, the divine wisdom seems to have preferred, what appears to us, the more partial method of immediate communications; nor are we informed that the persons thus inspired, were furnished with any supernatural means of diffusing the knowledge they received. Because the information necessary for the infant state of society, was probably little more, than unbiass'd reason, if properly directed, would itself sufficiently suggest or confirm; and therefore such a revelation could require no extraordinary evidence to procure its reception.

BUT,

BUT, when these dispensations ceased to be successful, when the improving condition of society admitted of a more complex system of religion, or the degeneracy of human manners required more explicit laws, and severer sanctions to resist its progress; the Almighty was pleased to make a fuller declaration of his nature and will to his peculiar people. But as this revelation contained injunctions of themselves indifferent, and doctrines, on the truth of which unaided reason could not decide; and was farther destined to remain for ages the standard of human conduct; these circumstances seemed to demand, that its authority should be established and continued by the most permanent and convincing evidence.

MIRACLES, implying a power more than human, were chosen and readily admitted, as the strongest proof of the divi-

nity of those laws, which they were wrought to confirm and enforce; and prophecy also, being the result of knowledge infinitely exceeding human attainments, was applied to support the Jewish economy, at the same time that it prepared the world for the introduction of a more perfect institution.

THESE were the two foundations, upon which all future revelations were for ever to rest their pretensions. As they exceeded the utmost bounds of human power and wisdom, they were a sufficient evidence of the divine interposition; and as they were plain facts, they were capable of being transmitted to the remotest posterity.

BUT as false religions were supported
** with all power, and signs, and lying wonders;*
 the spirit of wisdom vouchsafed to instruct
 his

* 2 Theff. ii. 9.

his people, in what manner the falsehood of their pretensions might be discovered through all the plausibility of their external proofs. *If there arise among you a prophet, and giveth you a sign or a wonder; though the sign or the wonder come to pass, of which he spake unto you, saying, let us go after other Gods, and serve them; ye shall not hearken unto the words of that prophet; For the Lord your God proveth you, to know whether you love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul.*

IN this passage we have a full description of the nature and effect of internal evidence: as we cannot judge with certainty, what shall be the matter of a divine revelation, or the stile and manner of a divine composition; the positive weight of internal arguments can seldom amount to more than this, that such a revelation may be of divine original. But their

negative force, and to this the Jewish lawgiver invites our attention, may easily overpower the strongest external evidence. For nothing can be more clear and undoubted, than that there are propositions, which it is unworthy of the Deity to reveal. Thus nothing, which is false, can possibly be taught by a God of truth; nothing, which is immoral, can be commanded by a God of purity. The instance, supposed in the text, is open to both these objections; as it implies at the same time, both a false doctrine, and an immoral precept. For the acknowledgement of one supreme Being is the first article in the creed of reason; the worship of him is the principal precept of natural religion. And to the Jews, the truth of the doctrine, and the obligation of the command had both been confirmed, in positive and repeated terms, by the authoritative voice of revelation. They were secured by every possible pro-

provision, and therefore, if their hearts and understandings were not utterly depraved, they could not, in so plain a point, be seduced or deceived, by the most artful pretences, or most specious miracles.

THE propriety of determining, in such cases, in favour of reason will easily appear. The reports of our senses are frequently fallacious, and require the correction of sober judgment. In them, we may mistake, or we may be deceived; but in the plainest and clearest convictions of reason we cannot err. If we could not depend on the guidance of this directing faculty, as we have no superior powers to correct its mistakes, every thing around us would be full of darkness and uncertainty. Where would be the use of natural laws, which we could not discover; or of revealed precepts, which we could not understand? There must then be some

conclusions of reason which are pressed on our minds with such irresistible force, that no contrary evidence, however clear, and however full, shall be able to shake our convictions. Thus were the absurdities of transubstantiation proposed to our belief on the credit of innumerable miracles, our assent must still be withheld; for we can never be so certain, that our senses are not deceived, as we are, that those plain propositions, which that doctrine contradicts, are undeniably true. And if this would be the case with the eye-witnesses of such pretended prodigies, with what redoubled force must the argument apply to those, who receive them only from tradition? and what can we think of that assent which rests on the foundation of human testimony, and is at the same time utterly incompatible with the authority of human reason?

A SYSTEM of religion then, which contains any thing contradictory to reason, with whatever external proofs it may come recommended, can by no means demand our belief.

BUT while the authority of reason in its fullest extent is freely acknowledged, let her not ambitiously invade the province of Faith: let her not proudly reject, whatever she did not perhaps expect, or cannot fully comprehend. In a dispensation, of itself so extensive, and which yet, for aught we know, may form but a small portion of a system begun from eternity, and to be continued to all eternity in one unbroken chain, many facts may take place, the connexion of which we cannot discover; and many measures may be necessary, the uses of which we cannot discern. Much more might be added to the same purpose; but what has been said will

will be sufficient to remove every suspicion of a wish to carry the authority of reason to an extent inconsistent with the claims of revelation.

WE cannot however dismiss this part of our subject, without considering an unworthy cavil of a celebrated writer*, who reminds us, that we forget the first and simplest rule of sound reasoning, while we prove, as he says, the doctrines of revelation by the miracles, and the miracles by the doctrines. The truth of this assertion our objector pretends to establish on the authority of Scripture itself, which, he boldly affirms, has in many places acknowledged, and even prescribed, the use of both these proofs; yet for the latter, the proof of miracles from the doctrines, the only passage he has chosen to quote is that of my text; in which, as we have seen, the

* Rousseau. Emile, Lec. 4.

the Jewish Lawgiver plainly directs his followers, not to infer the reality of miracles from the truth of doctrines, but only to remember, that no miraculous appearances could ever authorise their assent to a false doctrine, or their obedience to an impious command. This is allowed; and to the precept thus understood, the author has himself confined the application of his objection. Now so far as it is thus applied, every one must see, that the charge of absurd reasoning is perfectly without foundation. For surely there is no more absurdity in affirming, that doctrines unknown to reason may be proved by miracles, and that doctrines contrary to reason cannot, than there is in observing, that a proposition, of which we do not immediately perceive the truth, may be proved by the rules of reasoning, and that a proposition, of which we immediately perceive the falsehood, can be proved by no rules.

rules. The parallel holds with equal exactness throughout; as from the manifest falsehood of a proposition we rightly argue, that the reasoning on which it is supported, must be vicious and inconclusive; so in the same way, and with the same certainty do we infer from the falsehood of a doctrine, that the miracle confirming it must be a delusion. That we are deceived in both these cases is evident, though we may not always be able to detect the particular fallacy in either.

BUT, as the objection, however applied by the author, is expressed in general terms, which evidently tend to carry the insinuation much farther in the mind of the reader; it will be necessary to give a full answer to the whole of the argument.

IN the first place then, it must be allowed, that no doctrines whatever can
 prove

prove the reality of miracles. Neither has the sober advocate of religion ever affirmed, that they do. From the purity of a revelation we infer, not that the miracles wrought in its support are certainly true, but only that they may possibly be so. The proof of their reality remains, what it was before; to the eye-witness of the transaction, the evidence of the senses, and to all others, the weight of their testimony.

FURTHER, the suggestion, that miracles prove and are proved by the same thing, is evidently groundless on another account; for surely no two things can be more distinct from each other, than the precepts of morality, and the doctrines of religion; and supposing, which is not true, that we shew the reality of miracles from the purity of the former, still we transgress no rule of reasoning, when we apply the miracles

acles so proved to evince the truth of the latter.

Hitherto we have supposed, what is plainly necessary to give force to the objection, that the doctrines of religion are known only from revelation. But some of them are clearly demonstrable by reason, as the article referred to in the text, of the being, and (so far as it is opposed to the Polytheism of antiquity) the unity of God. Many of them, as that of a future state, are what, if reason could not prove, it was always ready to hope, and willing to admit. And most of them concur, which is a mark of their excellence, if not of their truth, in teaching men worthy conceptions of the attributes and government of God, and in affording additional motives to the exercise and improvement of human virtue. Now so far as the light
of

of Nature can discern the truth or excellence of revealed doctrines, so far do they constitute a valuable part of the internal evidences of Religion; all of which, however clearly they may shew, that it is an object not unworthy of miraculous interpositions, can themselves afford no proof, that it was in fact so established. Still however, if they do in any degree contribute to raise our ideas of the knowledge and character of the sacred writers, we shall argue neither falsely nor weakly, in concluding, that they add some confirmation to the testimony of those writers in other instances.

In an objection, which can be founded and supported only on a manifest misrepresentation of the arguments for Christianity, it is in vain we look for the author's acknowledged abilities, or professed sincerity. But with him such inconsistencies are fami-

familiar: he admires the religion, which he labours to destroy: the majesty of the Scriptures excites his astonishment, the sanctity of the Gospel fills him with reverence, and *the characters of truth impressed upon it are so striking, so perfectly inimitable, that he pronounces it more difficult to suppose it false, than to acknowledge it true. After these concessions, we cannot but lament the neglect of his own advice, to observe a respectful silence on a religion, which he owns himself unable, either to refute, or comprehend.

THE artful objections of the Infidel are not more dangerous to the Faith of weak Christians, than were the bold miracles of the
the

* Il seroit plus inconcevable que plusieurs hommes d'accord eussent fabriqué ce livre, qu'il ne l'est, qu'un seul en ait fourni le sujet. — & l'Évangile a des caractères de vérité si grands, si frappans, si parfaitement inimitables, que l'inventeur en seroit plus étonnant que le héros. *Emile*. V. 2. 87. O&c.

the Impostor, to the obedience of the wondering Jews. And as we now complain, that the proofs of true religion do not universally produce conviction; so might they lament, and with equal reason, that the claims of false religions were not always easily detected. These complaints, with innumerable others of the same nature, arise from want of considering the proper end of revelation. It was not designed to supersede the use of any of our faculties; but to encourage and assist us in the full exertion of them all. Men of leisure and attainments are required to give a proof of their inward sincerity, by allowing to every part of the evidence for religion its proper influence in directing their belief: while both they and all others are expected to shew the goodness of their hearts, by permitting to every precept, religious and moral, its due effect in regulating their actions. And as we see, that religion

B

does

does not necessarily compel the compliance of our passions; why should we expect it irresistibly to command the assent of our understanding? Its evidences might have been so clear, as to dispel every doubt, and remove every difficulty: and a revelation thus constituted might have afforded a magnificent display of the divine power; but would at the same time, have failed of a far more important effect, the trial of the docility and fairness of the human heart.

To accomplish a purpose so worthy of divine wisdom was probably the true, and certainly a sufficient reason, why the proofs of religion should be, what they are; surpassing all the power of human invention, and yet exposed to many seeming objections; abundantly clear to a candid mind, and yet sufficiently obscure to those, who are unwilling to admit conviction.

viction. *For the Lord your God proveth you, to know whether you love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul.*

THAT the integrity of our belief will form a part of our probation is not only indisputable from revelation, but from the nature of the thing highly equitable. Man is a compound of reason and passion; nor are these two principles less opposite in matters of speculation, than in practice. To hear the opinions of an adversary with attention and temper, to weigh them with care, to censure with diffidence, and decide with impartiality, is the conduct of a liberal and virtuous mind; but to treat an important inquiry with neglect or contempt, to suffer our judgement to be biased by prejudice, and perverted by passion, is universally acknowledged a

criminal abuse of the powers of the understanding.

THE exercise then, of our mental, no less than our moral faculties, the empire of right reason, or the tyranny of depraved affections, may justly become a test of our merit, or a proof of our guilt. And it may be as much the duty of a rational being, to yield his assent to the truth of religion, when supported by sufficient proofs; as it is the duty of a moral agent, to pay obedience to its precepts, when enforced by sufficient motives.

IN the common obligations of common life, it is not unusual, with subtle and perverse reasoners, to soften and refine away those duties, which are least easy and acceptable; till the fair form of virtue be expressed to equal disadvantage in their
sen-

sentiments and in their manners. This is a conduct of the understanding, which few approve; and yet it will be difficult to find arguments to condemn the sophist in morals, which will not at the same time strongly apply to the unbeliever in religion.

If the one abridges the Law of Nature, the other abrogates the Law of God; and if the one endeavours to narrow the limits of moral obligations, the other as fatally lessens their influence. For morality, when separated from religion, has lost its best and strongest support; its laws are no longer promulged with the same clearness and authority, its directions are no longer illustrated by the same perfect and unerring example, its obligations are no longer enforced by the same awful and immortal motives.

WE have seen then, that the Christian revelation requires our belief; if therefore it be of divine original, it must be furnished with sufficient means to engage that belief. But the clearest proofs may fail of conviction, if we refuse to allow them their due weight. Now of this we may be guilty in several ways. Indolence and inattention will not suffer us to form a proper judgement; prejudice and passion will urge us to make a wrong decision; and it is the pride, or the weakness of reason, which so often prompts men hastily to condemn the evidence of revelation from its contents. To justify so bold an inference, the contents of a revelation must be clearly such as no evidence can render credible; they must therefore be, not merely strange or inconceivable to us, but absolutely, and in their own nature, false or immoral. For denying the reality of miracles only on account of our ignorance

rance of the doctrines, they are brought to confirm, is little better than objecting to the premises of a demonstration, that the conclusion to be deduced from them is not either intuitive, or already proved.

LET not reason then transgress the bounds prescribed her by nature. Why should it be thought a thing incredible with us, that in the infinite counsels of Omniscience there may be many measures adopted, the reasons of which we cannot discover; and many effects resulting from causes, with which, to us at least, they have no apparent connexion? And surely we, who so imperfectly understand the least part of the human frame, ought not to be much surpris'd, if we do not perfectly comprehend all the mysteries of the divine nature.

WHEN we reflect on the conduct, and more especially on the nature of the Deity, we are lost and confounded in the immensity of the subject: the more we consider it, the more difficult it appears; the more it is unfolded, the farther it transcends the limits of our conceptions; and as the Sun in his unclouded glory is least the object of human vision, so is the great Father of light, when most clearly revealed, the most inscrutable to human reason.

WE have seen then, that a revelation proceeding from God may justly claim the belief of mankind — that the proper proofs of such a revelation are Miracles and Prophecy.—To examine the reality of these preternatural appearances is the province, and the duty of Reason: on this point her decisions are always authoritative,

tive, and commonly just. But even if we could be for a time deceived by the delusive arts, or the fortunate successes of an Impostor; we have still a secure resource in the incorruptible testimony of internal evidence, which infallibly discovers the falsehood of all weak or wicked pretensions; while it displays, in the clearest light, the beauty, consistence and dignity of true and undefiled Religion. Yet we must always remember, that the only internal marks, which are really decisive, are falsities or immoralities—these it is certainly unworthy of God to reveal, and disgraceful to man to receive. Other difficulties, as we have shewn, are the actual lists of speculative virtue, and consequently are useful; they may also rise from the imperfection of our nature, and be so far unavoidable: and surely it is vain to argue against the truth of revelation from its obscu-

obscurities, unless it can first be fully proved, that those obscurities are introduced without any possible necessity, and to answer no valuable end.



GAL. iii. 24.

WHEREFORE, THE LAW WAS OUR SCHOOL-
MASTER TO BRING US UNTO CHRIST.

THE most careless inquirer into the history of the Jews, will find abundant reason to conclude, that the Religion of that singular people, was certainly derived from God, and the course of their fortunes directed by his peculiar providence. For it is impossible not to observe, that a new order of events, such as no earthly Lawgiver ever dared to promise, was in the case of Moses not only promised, but in fact established; that the observance of his Laws was constantly attended with national glory and success,
and

and the breach of them invariably followed by public disgrace and calamity.

BUT, it may be asked, why should the supreme Being adorn the religion of his appointment, with a gaudy train of outward ceremonies; or produce so long a series of great and unexampled events, to display the reality of a dispensation, which yet was apparently not designed to extend beyond the limits of the single nation, in which it was originally established?

WITH regard to the admission of external rites, it is to be observed, that though they be separately, and in their own nature, neither useful to man, nor acceptable to God; yet are they undoubtedly, to a certain degree, and in their more simple forms, absolutely necessary, not only to the solemnity, but the very existence of all public worship. Many also of the more splendid

splendid ceremonies might be indulged to the Jews, in order to engage their attention, to soften the obstinacy of their national temper, or to counteract the attractions of the gay religions, with which they were surrounded. And even those ritual observances, which to our eyes have no visible connexion with any known duty; which the Moralist might overlook for their indifference, and the Legislator almost despise for their minuteness; even those are seen in some instances, and with reason therefore supposed in all, to have been curiously adapted to the situation of the people, to whom they were prescribed; and to have been highly favourable to the one main end of the Mosaic dispensation, which was to preserve the Jews a separate and distinct family in the midst of a corrupt world. For the intercourse of nations is by no means more effectually checked, than by the opposition of different

ferent manners and customs; and provided this difference be rendered sufficiently clear and striking, the Laws by which it is produced, however unimportant in their appearance, are attended with at least one proof of their wisdom, in the attainment of the object, to which they were directed.

BUT, supposing the Laws of Moses to be perfectly accommodated to the end they were appointed to answer, still it may be asked; Is not the end itself improper or unworthy to be pursued? Is it reconcileable with the justice of God, to confine his favour to one peculiar people or was it consistent with his wisdom, to select a nation, whose subsequent conduct presents us with one continued scene of perverseness, ingratitude, and idolatry?

EVEN to the Jew these questions may be not unanswerable; but the Christian will

will be led to think most highly of the ends of the Mosaic institution, if he consider, not only its effects on the people to whom it was given, but also its general influence on human society, and its particular connexion with Christianity: That it preserved among mankind the knowledge and worship of the one true God: that the superintendence of his providence over the natural and moral world was not only affirmed in words, but proved and exemplified in the various and wonderful revolutions of the Jewish commonwealth: that the Laws of Moses, if they be not the most complete, are undoubtedly the earliest system of Morality and Religion ever offered to mankind: and above all that the writings of the old Testament created an anxious expectation of the coming of Christ: that they prepared the world for his reception: and added light and strength to the proofs of his heavenly mission.

mission. It is this connected view, which presents each system of Religion in its proper beauty, and teaches us to divest ourselves of our unreasonable prejudices, and to acknowledge and admire alike in both *the power of God, and the wisdom of God**.

Now that the author of the Jewish œconomy had a farther and better end in view, than the temporal prosperity of a single nation, appears in some measure from the terms of the original promise made to Abraham; *In blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed, and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed†*. Plainly therefore the promise was, not merely of a partial benefit destined for this chosen people, but of an universal blessing to be by their instrumentality imparted to the whole race of Adam. And further, in the Mosaic dispensation, where
lit-

* 1 Cor. i. 24. † Gen. xxii. 17, 18.

little was left to the irregular agency of second causes, the design of the institution may be fairly and clearly inferred from the effects, which it really produced; and certainly the great end, which it did in fact accomplish, and to which in almost every religious rite, and in every public transaction, it had a visible and uniform reference, is the introduction of Christianity.

THERE are many particulars, in which the people of the Jews, either by their own conduct, or from the nature of the institutions, under which they lived, undeniably contributed to the success of Christianity. As the depositaries of the promises of God, and the predictions of his inspired servants, to them was intrusted the mysterious testimony, which would one day point out the Messiah; and the sure foundation, on which was to

mission. It is this connected view, which presents each system of Religion in its proper beauty, and teaches us to divest ourselves of our unreasonable prejudices, and to acknowledge and admire alike in both *the power of God, and the wisdom of God**.

Now that the author of the Jewish œconomy had a farther and better end in view, than the temporal prosperity of a single nation, appears in some measure from the terms of the original promise made to Abraham; *In blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed, and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed†*. Plainly therefore the promise was, not merely of a partial benefit destined for this chosen people, but of an universal blessing to be by their instrumentality imparted to the whole race of Adam. And further, in the Mosaic dispensation, where
lit=

* 1 Cor. i. 24. † Gen. xxii. 17, 18.

little was left to the irregular agency of second causes, the design of the institution may be fairly and clearly inferred from the effects, which it really produced; and certainly the great end, which it did in fact accomplish, and to which in almost every religious rite, and in every public transaction, it had a visible and uniform reference, is the introduction of Christianity.

THERE are many particulars, in which the people of the Jews, either by their own conduct, or from the nature of the institutions, under which they lived, undeniably contributed to the success of Christianity. As the depositaries of the promises of God, and the predictions of his inspired servants, to them was intrusted the mysterious testimony, which would one day point out the Messiah; and the sure foundation, on which was to

be built the future Religion of the world. That these writings were punctually fulfilled in Christ, is an argument for the truth of his mission. That they were fulfilled in a sense exactly opposite, to what had been in every age, the constant opinion, and favourite expectation of the Jews, is a clear proof of their authenticity. The same fact therefore shews, that the prophecies had been preserved among the Jews without any mixture of their invention; and were in the end accomplished among them without any assistance from their power.

THE same mistake of the Jews, in determining the sense of their prophetic scriptures, seems to have been attended also with another effect, which could not possibly be prejudicial to the Christian cause. The Roman Historians, in describing the reign of Vespasian, inform us, that an ancient

cient and constant opinion had prevailed throughout the East; that a Prince, to whom the empire of the world was destined, was at that time to come from Judea. Now as to the opinion itself, whatever were its meaning, or its origin, whether with the Romans we refer it to Vespasian, or with the Jews to their promised Messiah; whether we suppose it to have arisen from mere chance, to have been thrown out by an heathen oracle, or to have been founded, as is most probable, on the writings of the Hebrew prophets; we shall at least allow, that it must have strongly affected the minds of men, that it must have filled them with an anxious expectation of the event, and turned their attention irresistibly to the very smallest occurrence, which should take place among the distant and neglected mountains of Judea.

IN truth the conduct of the Jews has in every age, however undesignedly, been of essential service to the real interests of Christianity. Previously to the coming of Christ, they prepared the world, unknowingly indeed, for his reception; and the very methods, which they afterwards employed to suppress his pretensions, were eventually attended with a quite contrary effect. For when they delivered him into the power of the Roman Governor; what did they, but enable him to execute the great purpose, for which he came into the world, and that too in the very way, which the prophets had foretold? Thus also, while they were anxiously guarding against the pretended danger of a fictitious resurrection, were they not in fact providing the strongest confirmation of the true? And, not to mention any other instances, the continued and excessive enmity, with which they harrassed the new religion, in
its

its rise and in its progress, has undoubtedly; not only added new force to many parts of its positive evidence; but effectually secured the whole from one considerable objection: as it prevented every suspicion of a national confederacy, and precluded almost the very possibility of a private fraud; for if any such had been, we see their willingness, and we know the power and opportunities, which they must have had, to detect and defeat it. Thus in the last years of their political existence, their opposition was a firmer support to Christianity, than their testimony could possibly have been: and in their subsequent ruin and dispersion, their obstinate rejection of its claims has in effect proved fully equivalent to the most incontrovertible testimony in its behalf. For that rejection and that ruin had been expressly foretold by Christ: the destruction of the City and Temple particularly is the sub-

ject of predictions, which are attended with every mark, that distinguishes the true from the pretended prophet; and which were delivered at a time, when scarcely any event could be conceived more unlikely. For what could be more remote from all reasonable expectation, than that the Daughter of Sion, humbled by many ages of servitude and suffering, would ever dare to provoke and resist the acknowledged Mistress of the world; that this unequal contest would yet be continued to the last fatal extremity; and that the name of Jerusalem would soon be ranked with those of Carthage and of Corinth, with the few illustrious cities, which had ever been deliberately destroyed by the Jealousy, the Revenge, or the Caprice of Rome?

THE subsequent dispersion of this devoted People, which had been mentioned by Christ, and more largely described by
their

their own Prophets, is not the least singular, or instructive period of their eventful history.

THE nations, which once shook the world with their arms, have in their turns disappeared, and mingled again with the common mass of mankind: but the Jews, though exiles in every country under heaven, and in every country, oppressed, hated, and despised, have yet by a peculiar fate, of which the history of the world affords no second instance, survived for seventeen centuries the loss of their country, and the dissolution of their government; have preserved their name and language, their customs and religion, in every climate of the globe; and, though themselves not a people, have yet subsisted a separate and distinct race in the midst of every other nation: thus exhibiting a wonderful example

of the truth of their own scriptures, and in consequence, a continual and increasing evidence of the authority of ours.

In this place it may be worthy our notice, that the very peculiarities of the Mo-
saic institution, which, or how many of
them indeed we know not, were plainly
necessary, to produce so extraordinary an
appearance in the Jewish history, and to
establish this great argument in favour of
Christianity.

If then those rites of the Law, which
are apparently least significant, have been
thus beneficial to our Religion; it may
naturally be expected, that the more im-
portant ceremonies, which added splen-
dour and solemnity to the service of the
temple, will certainly discover somewhat
of the same tendency.

It

It has indeed been thought, and not entirely without reason, that the origin of all sacrifices, heathen as well as Jewish, bears an evident allusion to the Christian scheme of Redemption. That this mode of propitiation did prevail, in all ages, and among every people, is certain; but nothing is more obscure than the cause of that prevalence. Why so many nations of different times, of distant places, and of opposite manners, should yet all agree in receiving a custom, which has no visible foundation in reason or nature, is a difficulty, of which no probable account can be given, but on the supposition, that expiatory sacrifices were required from our first parents, as they afterwards were, we know, from the Jews, by the express appointment of God. But for this appointment what particular reason can we discern, unless it were intended to prefigure the true atonement of Christianity; and
to

to prepare the minds of men for the gradual opening of that mysterious scene, when the great Author of our salvation was to *appear once in the end of the world to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself**.

BUT be this as it may, for with the origin and end of the heathen sacrifices we have properly no concern: it will be sufficient for our purpose to shew, that among the numerous sacrifices of the Jews, some at least were so contrived as to exhibit a typical representation of the propitiatory influence, which is ascribed to the death of our Redeemer. On this subject it were easy for a lively imagination to carry the pursuit of fanciful similitudes to an unwarrantable length. But we have the authority of almost every apostolical writer to assert, that the resemblance between the death of Jesus and the passover of the Jews, is neither accidental

* Hebr. ix. 26.

tal nor imaginary. And one of the inspired authors has drawn a very circumstantial parallel between the priesthood of Christ and that of Aaron, between the one atonement made for the sins of mankind, and the expiation annually offered for the errors of the Jewish people*.

Thus to the Jew were the evidences of Christianity wrought into the body and substance of his own religion: he might see the Law fulfilled in the Gospel; and therefore ought no longer to be surprised, that, after the end of their appointment had been completed, *the Sanctuary was destroyed, and the sacrifice and the oblation ceased*†.

NOR can it be thought the result of mere chance only, that these most important parts of the legal worship have long since sunk into disuse; while other parts of the ritual,

* Hebr. ix. 7. † Dan. ix. 26, 27.

ritual, seemingly the most trifling, are at this day punctually observed. One plain reason may be seen of this difference. For the former, as they prefigured the priestly office of Christ, had already at the time of his coming fully answered the end of their institution, and could be of no further service to his cause; but the latter, so long as they keep the Jews a separate and distinct people, do continue to bear a perpetual testimony to the truth of his Religion.

THERE was also another institution peculiar to the Jewish kingdom, and derived from the nature of its constitution, which was destined to furnish one of the great and leading evidences of Christianity. The institution, I refer to, is that of the prophetic office; *The spirit of prophecy is undoubtedly the testimony of Jesus* *. And with

* Rev. xix. 10.

with what various and increasing degrees of light was this testimony given? with what caution and preparation was the character of their Messiah gradually opened to the Jews? The several parts of it were delivered at different times, with an evident reference to the different situations of that people; and with circumstances so numerous, and seemingly so contradictory, as to render it difficult to be mistaken, when realised in his person, and impossible to be assumed by the most artful impostor.

ON the fall of our first Parents, he is intimated rather than described, as *the seed of the woman*, who should one day *bruise the serpent's head**. At the call of Abraham, he is further pointed out, though still in very general terms, as the seed of that patriarch, *in whom all the nations of the*

* Gen. iii. 15.

the earth should be blessed *. When the descendants of Jacob are first distinguished into tribes, he is promised to the tribe of Judah; at his coming, they are told, the distinction between them would cease, and *to him would the gathering of the people be* †. On the publication of the Law he is represented in the character of a prophet and a lawgiver like unto Moses ‡, *who beheld*

* Gen. xxii. 18. † Gen. xlix. 10.

‡ It has been shewn, that the public sacrifices of the Jews were typical of the Christian sacrifice; and it here appears not only that the fortunes of the nation were so conducted, as to afford opportunities at least for the description of the distinct offices ascribed to Christ, but that the lives of individuals also, and the character and conduct of their eminent men are in some instances represented as types of their future Messiah. With respect to the example alledged above, whoever will peruse the parallel given by Dr. Jortin, in his Remarks on Ecclesiastical History V. 1st. p. 203. may see, that the circumstances, in which this resemblance between the Jewish and the Christian Lawgiver is observable, are much too numerous to be the effect of accident; and not only too numerous,

beheld the similitude of the Lord, and with whom the Lord spake face to face, as a man speaketh to his friend*. On the establishment of regal government in Israel, he is described as a King, and promised to the house of David. In the days of their prosperity, his throne is for ever and ever, his dominion is from sea to sea, all kings fall down before him, all nations do him service†. In the decline of their state, and on the eve of their captivity, he is their Redeemer and deliverer, the rod, which cometh out of the root of Jesse, the ensign which is lifted up to the people; he is sent to proclaim liberty to the captive, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound‡; and in his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely§. When Jerusalem was first made

the

rous, but many of them too important, and some perhaps too minute, to be the mere result of human imitation and contrivance.

* Deut. xviii. 15. Ex. xxxiii. 11. Num. xii. 8.

† Pf. xlv. 6. lxxii. 8. 11. ‡ Is. lxi. 1. § Jer. xxiii. 6.

the feat of national religion, he was declared to be *a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedech*. And when the Nation, upon their return from their long exile, wept over the apparent inferiority of the second temple, they were consoled with the assurance, that *the glory of the latter house would be greater than that of the former, for in it should peace be given, and unto it should the desire of all nations come* *.

WE see then how naturally the events, which are of most importance in the history of the Jews, gave occasion to their prophets to describe the principal circumstances in the character of their future Messiah. And we cannot but observe also the anxious care, with which every part of this description is guarded from the several misconceptions, that were to be apprehended from the religious, or national pride

* Hagg. ii. 7. 9.

pride of the people, to whom it was given, or that might be occasioned by the figurative nature of the language, in which it was delivered.

To wean the minds of the Jews from their undue attachment to the religion of Moses, the *faithful Priest*, who had been promised, was neither to be of the tribe of Levi, nor after the order of Aaron. His priesthood was to continue for ever; yet the peculiar feat and ceremonies of the national worship would soon be abolished, *the sanctuary itself be destroyed, and the sacrifice and oblation cease* *.

THEIR lofty pretensions as the peculiar people of God were checked by the clear and repeated declarations of their own Scriptures; which instead of encouraging them in their selfish and contracted notions,

* Dan. ix. 26, 27.

tions, had expressly assured them, that the seed promised to Abraham was to be a blessing, not to his posterity alone, but *to all the nations of the earth*; that he who was *to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and restore the preserved of Israel*, was at the same time destined *to be a light unto the Gentiles, and salvation unto the end of the earth**.

AND in order to remove every possibility of understanding the predictions relating to their Messiah in a literal and temporal sense; this eternal King, they are told, was to be *cut off*; this everlasting Priest was *to make his soul an offering for sin*; this universal Monarch was to be *despised and rejected of men, and oppressed and afflicted*† in the world.

THE splendid imagery, which adorns the triumphant character of the Messiah, is in these and other passages accompanied with

* If. xlix. 6.

† If. liii.

with so many natural and pathetic descriptions of his humiliation and sufferings, of their circumstances and effects, and with so many remarkable predictions both of his general temper and conduct, and of particular actions and events; that the writings of the prophets, it must be acknowledged, not only ought in reason to have engaged the belief of their own nation, but have in fact been attended with this valuable consequence, that the whole of the character has never, in any age or nation of the world, been applied to any other, than the single person, of whom we believe it intended.

FURTHER, the Argument from prophecy in favour of Christianity, which appears considerable even in this imperfect sketch, acquires additional force also, from the connection of the predictions belonging to Christ with those which are confined to the Jewish people.

THEIR connection with any writings of national history or concern would naturally recommend them to public notice and study: their connection with predictions already fulfilled, not only made them more generally known and more carefully preserved, but created an assured expectation of their future accomplishment: and if there be also in some instances a further and closer connection, if the same prophecy foretel at once the temporal deliverance of the tribes of Israel from the oppressive hand of their enemies, and the great spiritual deliverance of the whole race of Adam from the power and punishment of Sin; this connection will form an additional proof of the intimate union which subsists between the two successive dispensations, will afford a more conspicuous display of the divine prescience, and will give fresh light and strength to the argument derived from these prophecies: because

because it entirely secured them from every attempt to pervert their meaning, or to frustrate their effect; and equally precluded the artful pretensions of human imposture, and the daring opposition of human power. For the Impostor, who must consult the prejudices of his contemporaries, would never apply to himself those predictions, which in the general opinion had already received their completion; nor would the malice of an unbelieving nation be exerted to prevent, what no one feared, their further and final accomplishment.

THAT the evidence of prophecy was preserved from these difficulties may also in part, perhaps in great part, be ascribed to the lofty stile of figure and allusion, in which, as we have already seen, the blessings of the new dispensation were often announced. For this circumstance in the

prophetic language, if it gave rise to the temporary inconvenience of mistaken expectations, was at the same time productive of advantages much more permanent and extensive, by disconcerting the dangerous efforts of opposition and imposture. That it had a natural and strong tendency to disconcert those efforts, is evident; because all human attempts, whether to effect or defeat the completion of prophecies, must unavoidably be directed by the sense in which they are generally understood; and in the case of these prophecies therefore, by the very reverse of that, in which they were really accomplished. Such in fact was the conduct of all the pretended Messiahs who so often and so fatally misled their deluded countrymen: and thus the same principle enables us to account for the infidelity of the Jewish nation in one instance, and their strange credulity in so many others. The frequent
 repre-

representations of the future glories of the Messiah under the image of an earthly kingdom were, not indeed the necessary and unavoidable cause, but the only specious pretext, for those vain hopes of conquest and dominion, which dazzled the worldly and ambitious minds of the Jewish Rulers; and led them, while they were anxiously looking for a triumphant deliverer, to *despise and reject the man of sorrows, the oppressed and afflicted Saviour, who was brought as a Lamb to the slaughter, who poured out his soul unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors**; though the same prophet, who foretold his humiliation, had also explained its real object and effects; that he thereby *bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors**.

THUS was the plan of prophecy so wisely constituted, that the passions and

D 4

preju-

* Is. liii. 7. 12.

prejudices of the Jews instead of frustrating, fulfilled it; and rendered the person, whom they rejected, the suffering and crucified Saviour, who had been promised.

To conclude. However slight some of these observations may have singly appeared, the whole weight of evidence arising from so many concurring circumstances cannot be inconsiderable; the number and importance of the facts, which have thus, in every age of the world, been directed to one uniform design, plainly lead our minds from the contemplation of every inferior cause to the great disposer of events. The scheme of Redemption, which was obscurely intimated to our first parents, and afterwards to the patriarchs, appears to have been gradually opened by a preparatory dispensation of fifteen hundred years, of which no other end can be assigned, and of which the peculiarities can

can be accounted for on no other principle. The temper of the people likewise, little as it could of itself recommend them to the divine choice, was not unsuitable to the purpose, for which they were chosen. Their gross and carnal apprehensions seem to have required that pomp of sacrifice and ceremony, which though quite unavailing itself, * *had a shadow of good things to come*, and prefigured the real and efficacious atonement of a spiritual and refined Religion. Their perverse ingratitude to the great and holy Being, under whose peculiar government they were so visibly placed, gave occasion to that uninterrupted succession of inspired men, who however differing in the immediate object of their predictions, did all of them uniformly bear testimony to the future Religion of Christ. Their early and obstinate opposition to this religion had no other effect, but to hasten the accom-

* Heb. x. 1.

accomplishment of the prophecies, on which it was founded. Their subsequent and continued rejection of it has in every age afforded a still subsisting and increasing proof of its heavenly origin. And how great an accession of evidence to the same truth may be hereafter derived from their conversion and restoration, we cannot indeed fully know; though that it must be very considerable, we can easily see, and have the authority of an Apostle to believe. *For if the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world; what shall the receiving of them be, but life from the dead*?*

* Rom. xi. 15.



(20)

LUKE xxiv. 19.

CONCERNING JESUS OF NAZARETH, WHICH
WAS A PROPHET MIGHTY IN DEED AND
WORD BEFORE GOD AND ALL THE PEOPLE.

THE arguments for the divine mission
of Christ, which are derived from
the miracles performed by himself and his
Apostles, have been explained with a force
and accuracy, to which little perhaps can
now be added.

THE argument from the prophecies of
the Old Testament has been considered in
every age, as another great support of the
christian system; and has continued to
receive fresh light from the judgement of
later divines, and the well-directed re-
searches of modern critics.

Its

Its weight and importance are indeed obvious; every accomplished prediction is a species of miracle; its uses are the same; and the evidence of its reality is even less liable to doubt and dispute; because it is almost always confirmed by the concurrent testimony of two distinct sets of men; one of which are witnesses to the delivery of the prophecy, and the other to the truth of the fact, in which it was completed.

If then the evidence derived from Prophecy be so peculiarly convincing, it may seem strange, that any part of it should have been neglected: yet have the predictions delivered by our Saviour himself been comparatively but little noticed: one or two of the more remarkable have indeed been separately stated; but the argument resulting from the whole has been less frequently and less diligently considered.

ONE

ONE reason of this inattention may perhaps be assigned. The facts foretold by Christ, it is acknowledged, had many of them taken place, before the books of the New Testament were published to the world. In these instances therefore, it may be said, the prediction and its accomplishment are witnessed only by the same persons, and consequently fail of giving that entire satisfaction, of which this sort of evidence is capable.

THIS defect, which we shall hereafter see reason not to admit in the extent here stated, was the natural and unavoidable consequence of the different intentions, with which these prophecies were delivered. All of them were doubtless designed to manifest the truth of Christianity, with different degrees of light indeed, to all ages; but some of them were more particularly calculated to confirm the faith, and
animate

animate the courage of the Apostles themselves; to turn their minds from the gross and groundless expectations, which they had all so strongly imbibed, to the spiritual and real object of their Lord's mission; and to support their desponding spirits under all the sufferings, which were to attend the several stages both of his ministry and of their own. Now even on the supposition that these were the only ends to be secured by those prophecies; it is surely some advantage to the cause of Christianity, that we are able to shew, that its first preachers were not publishers of facts, which they had hastily believed, from the partiality of affection, the credulity of their disposition, or the rashness of their natural tempers; but which had been confirmed to them by every species of rational evidence, which it is requisite to produce or even possible to conceive.

IN

IN the consideration of ancient prophecies, the material subjects of enquiry are these; Were they certainly delivered, before the events, to which they refer, had taken place? Do they clearly correspond with those events? and, Were the events themselves extraordinary, unlikely, or remote; or such only, as human prudence and sagacity may pretend to foresee, and human artifice or power may be supposed able to effect?

THAT the events foretold by Christ are thus extraordinary will appear hereafter; that they punctually agree with the predictions, is in most cases too clear to need illustration, or to admit of dispute; and that the predictions themselves were really delivered, before those events had happened, is confirmed by sufficient proofs, though not always of the same nature or of equal strength. Thus the prophecies,
which

which describe the destruction of Jerusalem, and the subsequent calamities of the Jewish people, and some of those which unfold the future fortunes of the Christian church, were certainly not accomplished at the time, when the writings, in which they are recorded, were given to the world : and therefore the evidence for these, and of consequence that arising from them, is something beyond, and distinct from, the testimony of the apostles. Again, for the previous delivery of these predictions we have sometimes many other witnesses beside the disciples ; the examples, I would more particularly point out, are those, which relate to the resurrection of Christ, to the approaching rejection of the Jews, and the call and conversion of the Gentile world ; all of which were undoubtedly both heard and understood by the Jews themselves. And lastly, the previous delivery of every one of these predictions

dictions is established on the testimony of the Apostles and other disciples; which must be allowed to be in itself an evidence of at least equal strength, with what has ever been either given or required for the confirmation of any other facts. And in these instances it acquires a peculiar degree of credibility from the circumstances, with which it is attended. For, if the Apostles had purposely invented a chain of pretended prophecies, with the interested view of doing honour to their Lord, they would assuredly have so contrived the prudent fiction, as to reflect at least no needless dishonour on themselves: but the relation of these prophecies on the contrary is accompanied almost invariably with the humiliating confession of their own ignorance and guilt, their weakness and misconduct, their strange and perpetual misapprehensions, not only with respect to the spirit of their master's doctrine, or the

E

nature

nature of his kingdom, but the obvious meaning of his plainest words and declarations.

BUT to come to the consideration of the prophecies themselves: they cannot perhaps be better or more clearly arranged, than in the order of the events, to which they allude.

THE transactions, which ended with the death of Jesus, were foretold in terms so plain and direct, with such a truth and minuteness of circumstance, as manifestly to exclude every suspicion, that can be founded on the happiness of conjecture, or the obscurity of application. That these sufferings were to be brought upon him by the enmity of the Jews, assisted by the treachery of an Apostle, who was frequently hinted at, and at length openly pointed out to the rest of the Apostles
and

and to himself — that in the moment of distress the eleven would all of them forsake their Lord — and that he among them, who was of greatest courage, he, who was directed to strengthen his brethren, he, who was *the rock, on which was to be built the church of Christ*, that he, would not only be guilty of the same weakness, but would thrice deny, that he knew him; — that the Jews would deliver up a man, whom they could accuse of no crime, and whom they had lately hailed with *Hosanna to the Son of David*, that they would deliver him up to a foreign nation, whose authority they all reluctantly admitted, and many pretended from principles of Religion to deny and abhor — and that the Romans, without any motive whatever, would mock, insult and scourge him, and at last, merely to gratify the demands of a turbulent and despised populace, condemn him to the cruel and dis-

graceful death, which was reserved for the punishment of the meanest and most abandoned criminals—These circumstances are such, both in their number and nature, that though they may perhaps, after the fact, be explained consistently enough with the usual principles of human conduct; yet is it quite inconceivable, that they could ever be the objects of human foresight and expectation.

To support the minds of his disciples at this awful crisis, Jesus had before assured them, that the scene of his ministry on earth, though to be thus interrupted, would not yet be fully closed, but that on the third day *he would rise again* from the dead, and *go before them into Galilee* *. The prediction however of his resurrection, though delivered in the plainest terms, appears to have been by the Apostles but very imperfectly understood, and to have left

* Matth. xxvi. 32.

left so weak an impression on their minds, that they scarcely had any hope of the event; nay that, even after the event, *when they had heard that he was alive, and had been seen, they believed not* *. Yet the Jews, whether they were guided by stronger judgement, or impelled by more active passions, had certainly obtained truer notions of the meaning of the prophecy, though to them it was neither so frequently repeated, nor so clearly expressed. But how difficult soever it may be, to account for the ignorance of the Apostles and the knowledge of the Jews, and to assign to each its distinct cause; the use and effect of both may be easily seen: both of them furnish us with an argument for the previous delivery of the prophecy; and both of them undoubtedly contributed to enlarge that accumulated mass of evidence, which arose on every side to establish the reality of its completion.

* Mark xvi. 11.

WITH the same affectionate concern for his disciples, which anticipated all their wants, to reconcile their minds to his final departure from them, Jesus assured them, *that he would not leave them comfortless, that he would pray the Father, who would send them another comforter**: not merely to support them under their approaching trial, but also to prepare them for the successful discharge of their future ministry, *to teach them all things, and bring to their remembrance, whatsoever he had himself said unto them†*. And not only their minds were to be thus illumined with wisdom from above, but even the course of nature was to be subjected to their control; that they might fully evidence to the world, the authority, under which they acted, and the truth, of what they taught. *These signs shall follow them, that believe. In my name they shall cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents; and*

if

* John xiv. 16.

† John xiv. 26.

if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover.*

IN considering the history of the infant church, it is natural to feel some surprise, when we are informed, that the very Apostle, who had the singular weakness to deny his Lord, was afterwards the most active in his service, and was the first, who boldly preached in his name, both to the Jews, and to the Gentiles. And when we recollect, that these almost contradictory circumstances in the conduct of this Apostle had been both of them expressly foretold by Jesus; it cannot but increase our admiration of that intuitive discernment, with which the Saviour of the world surveyed, not only the course of external events, but the more intricate and hidden motions of the human heart. Of the prophecies here alluded to, I shall cite only that, which

E 4

relates

* Mark xvi. 17, 18.

relates to the point more immediately before us, the strenuous exertions of St. Peter in the first establishment of the Gospel; and this prediction, if it be not perhaps necessarily confined to the particular facts, that have been stated, is however certainly conceived in terms, which are highly expressive of the Apostle's general character, and set before us in the strongest light, both the fortitude of the man, and the success of his ministry. *I say unto thee, that thou art Peter, and on this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it* *.

THOUGH the conversion of the Gentiles was not undertaken by this Apostle till four years after the death of Christ, nor even then without the express command and cooperation of heaven; yet, that the Gentiles were to become partakers of the new covenant, had been foretold in nu-

merous

* Matth. xvi. 18.

merous passages; some of them asserting this proposition separately, and others connecting it with the rejection of the Jews from the privilege, which they had so long exclusively enjoyed, of being the peculiar people of God. Thus the acceptance of the Gentiles is figured in the parable of the Prodigal: their being to be placed on an equal footing with the Jews is intimated in that of the labourers, who were at different hours hired into the vineyard; and is more openly declared by Christ in his character of the good Shepherd, *Other Sheep I have, which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice, and there shall be one fold and one Shepherd* *. And again, *The Stone, which the builders rejected, is become the head of the corner* †. An expression not so much denoting the eminence and dignity of his office, as its effect to unite both Jews and Gentiles in one building and

* John x. 16. † Matth. xxi. 42.

and Church. But, whatever may be the obscurity of this passage, it is immediately followed by one, which can hardly be misunderstood. *Therefore I say unto you, the kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof**. And lastly, in the parable of the King, who made a marriage for his Son, *the king saith to his servants, the wedding is ready, but they, which were bidden, were not worthy. Go ye therefore into the highways, and as many as ye find, bid to the marriage†*.

THE great event declaratory of the final rejection of the Jewish people, and the close of the Mosaic œconomy, was the destruction of Jerusalem. This event therefore was repeatedly and circumstantially predicted. Thus in the parable last quoted, *The King sendeth forth his armies, and destroyeth those murderers, and burneth up their city.*

* Matth. xxi. 43 † Matth. xxii. 1, &c.

city. Thus also, the pathetic address, *O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, which killest the Prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee,* concludes with this awful denunciation, *Behold, your house is left unto you desolate* *. The nature and extent of this desolation is more clearly pointed out in a similar passage of the same Evangelist; *For the days shall come upon thee, that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side, and shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee, and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another* †. But it is most fully and particularly unfolded in that minute description, which has been preserved by three of the four Evangelists. After the enumeration of the signs, *when these things would come to pass,* it is added, *there shall be great distress in the land, and wrath upon this people; and they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall*

* Luke xiii. 34, 35. † Ib. xix. 43, 44.

*shall be led away captive into all nations, and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled**. Verily I say unto you, *this generation shall not pass away, till all these things be fulfilled†*. And the Gospel must first be published among all nations‡. The nearness of the time, which was thus fixed for the accomplishment of this great revolution—the interval, which, short as it would be, was to be distinguished also by a revolution in religion still more extraordinary than this in power,—the signs, which were to precede the event predicted—the nation, which was to effect it—the extreme misery of the besieged inhabitants—the total ruin of the city—and the compleat dispersion of the people in every country of the world—these several points are all so particularly and distinctly marked, and have all been fulfilled with so great a degree

* Luke xxi. 24.

† Matth. xxiv. 34.

‡ Mark xiii. 10.

gree of exactness, as to make the narration resemble history rather than prophecy.

THEN as to the limit, which seems to be graciously assigned to the sufferings of this once favoured people; the event is yet indeed in the counsels of God; it is an event, however, which is still plainly possible; and we may observe, as one mark of its probability, that there is not, nor ever was, upon earth, any other nation, which had been so long and so widely dispersed, whose restoration, I will not say, could possibly be effected, but if it were effected, could possibly be ascertained.

So soon was the civil and religious polity of the Jews to be abolished; and with it would cease of course their powerful opposition to the planting and growth of Christianity. Of the violence of this opposition the Apostles had been often forewarned.

warned. The service, on which they were sent, was constantly represented to them, as a service of difficulty, danger, and suffering; in which they would be persecuted by the Jews, oppressed by the Gentiles, abandoned by friends, betrayed by relations, and opposed by all men. *Behold I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves**; they shall lay their hands on you, and persecute you; delivering you up to the synagogues, and into prisons; being brought before kings and rulers, for my name's sake, for a testimony to them and to the Gentiles. And ye shall be betrayed by parents, and brethren, and kinsfolk, and friends; And ye shall be hated of all men†; yea the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you, will think he doeth God service‡.

THAT in the dawn, and even under the full light of the Gospel, the general state of

* Matth. x. 16.

† Luke xxi. 12. 16, 17.

‡ John xvi. 2.

of the world would but little correspond with the benevolent design of the dispensation itself, is very strongly expressed; *I am come to send fire on earth; and what will I, if it be already kindled? Suppose ye, that I am come to send peace on earth, I tell you nay, but rather division* *. These remarkable words of our Saviour are, not descriptive of the general end proposed by his coming, but prophetic of the partial effects produced by human opposition and perversion: and however contradictory they may be to the temper and tendency of Christianity, they have been but too fully accomplished in those calamitous events, which have in fact attended its promulgation and establishment; and may be equally referred to the enmity of heathens, and the divisions of Christians; to the persecutions, which Christianity at first suffered, and the no less fatal persecutions, with which its rival sects in almost every

age,

* Luke xii. 49. 51.

age, to the disgrace and reproach of themselves and their profession, have mutually oppressed, harrassed, and destroyed each other.

STILL however the violence of the adversaries of Religion, and even the vices of its adherents, though they have undoubtedly impeded its progress and perverted its spirit, have neither of them prevented the accomplishment of those prophecies, which relate to its stability and success: *On this Rock will I build my church, and the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it.*

ITS weak and inconsiderable beginnings, its great and unexpected progress, its beneficent and extensive effects, are all of them with equal clearness and beauty prefigured in the following parable. *The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard*

tard feed, which a man sowed in his field, which indeed is the least of all seeds, but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof. In this allusion, the friend of Christianity might perhaps discern the suddenness of its first springing up, and the rapidity of its early growth, as well as the large and flourishing spread of its confirmed maturity. But what need can there be of conjecture, where we have the express declaration of Christ? *I tell you of a truth, there be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the kingdom of God†; till the authority of Christ be openly displayed in the punishment of the obdurate and unbelieving Jews: which event, as we have already seen, was not to take place, till after the Gospel had been preached in all the world for a testimony**

* Matth. xiii. 31, 32.

† Luke ix. 27.

mony to all nations. So widely was the knowledge of the Gospel to be diffused in a part only of the short space allotted by nature to the life of man; and so widely, in a fair and sufficient sense of the words, does the history of the church inform us, that it was in fact diffused.

THAT the conversion of mankind to one faith would be accomplished to so great a degree, in so short a time, and by such inadequate means, was an event, of which human reason could see no probability, and for which the former experience of the world could afford not the slightest presumption. The Jews, we are told, *would compass sea and land to make one proselyte**; yet the Religion of Moses, notwithstanding the divinity of its origin, the zeal of its teachers, and the peaceful disposition of men towards it, still answered its original purpose of distinguishing the descendents of Abraham

* Matth. xxiii. 15.

ham from every other people. And what improvement in the opinions and manners, not of the great body of mankind, but of any single nation, can be traced from the Precepts of Philosophy, though recommended, adorned, and exemplified by the wisdom, the eloquence, and the virtues of the most enlightened periods of antiquity? If then the great Masters of human reason, with every advantage of rank and learning, with the favour and applause of their own times, and the veneration of every succeeding age, were so little successful, to what can we impute the sudden triumph of Christianity, but to the *power of God and the wisdom of God?*

To conclude. Beside the numerous predictions, which have been here adduced, many more relating to the same events might have been easily collected, and some perhaps belonging to others may have been

faultily omitted; these however are amply sufficient to shew, that the prophetic character in its very highest perfection may be justly ascribed to Christ.

THE events predicted are numerous and important; all of them are incidents, not taken at random, but immediately related to the end and effects of his own ministry; many of them are facts of such a nature, as when considered singly were peculiarly unlikely; some again are so connected with each other, that the failure of any one must have broken and destroyed the whole series; and others are apparently so repugnant, that the accomplishment of one seemed to render the rest utterly impossible.

WE may observe too, that these predictions are very many of them delivered with the utmost simplicity, and describe the several events in the plain language of nature,

ture, without any obscurity of figure, or uncertainty of application: even the parables themselves are as clear, as the species of composition seems to allow; so clear indeed, that these, which relate to future events, are not at all more dark and difficult than those, which allude to the nature of religion, or the plain duties of morality.

FURTHER, the correspondence between the predictions, and the facts, in which they were completed, is so perfect, that scarcely a single prediction of any other prophet can be produced, in which that correspondence may be more distinctly seen, or is more closely and uniformly preserved, than in the greater part of the instances now read to you.

AND lastly, if to these marks of excellence we add, that these predictions were

professedly delivered to give credit and stability to a revelation, which pretended to be derived from heaven, and which therefore clearly demanded, if any thing can demand, the particular interposition of God to support it if true, or to defeat it if false; we cannot but allow, that the prophecies of Christ afford a strong confirmation to the truth of that religion, which they were given to introduce, and in the beginnings and progress, the misfortunes and success of which, they have been all of them, so amply and exactly verified.



LUKE xvi. 31.

IF THEY HEAR NOT MOSES AND THE PROPHETS, NEITHER WILL THEY BE PERSUADED, THOUGH ONE RISE FROM THE DEAD.

MEN of the most accomplished reason, do not always act or think rationally. There is some favourite indulgence or system, which possesses a powerful influence over their minds, and, as often as it interferes with the directions of duty, overcomes all the obligations of morality, and all the proofs of religion.

THE evidences of religion, it is acknowledged, are not demonstrative; they are, what unbiaſſed reason would expect in the proofs of a plain fact, founded on testimony,

timony, but on testimony so ample, as never was either given or required to evince the reality of any other transactions.

YET there are men, who from preconceived opinions concerning the attributes of God, and his design in creating the world, have been led to complain, that the evidences of Christianity are not such, as they expected, nor so convincing, as its importance required.

IT is easy to see, how those, who will form a system of religion from their own conceptions, are imperceptibly led into errors. The pride of the Philosopher is concerned to support, whatever is most honourable to human reason; and the wishes of the Man are strongly interested, in whatever is most favourable to human happiness. Thus disposed, it is no way wonderful, that, in meditating on the attributes

tributes of the supreme Being, they principally delight to contemplate his benevolence; and in assigning the portion, which such a Being would allot to his creatures, they pronounce it to be at least final happiness.

BUT, before they ventured on so bold a decision, they ought to have considered, that God is just, as well as good; that man is not innocent; and that the pardon of guilt may be as incompatible with infinite justice, as its punishment can be with infinite goodness.

THUS, by a fond reliance on the powers of the understanding, and a strange mixture of the suggestions of passion with the dictates of reason, speculative men are frequently betrayed into rash and presumptuous conclusions on the whole scheme of Religion.

IN

In the following observations it is intended to shew, that the evidences of religion are sufficient to engage our belief; that to have made them irresistible would have been a measure equally inconsistent with the usual conduct of the Deity, and with the particular design of Christianity; and that stronger evidence, if it were granted, would probably have no considerable effect on the manners of mankind.

CHRISTIANITY was originally established in the world by miracles and prophecies; but to us, the proof, that those miracles were really wrought, and those prophecies delivered, must at last depend on the validity of human testimony.

THE proofs, arising from the clearest testimony, cannot indeed be more than probable: but probability admits of very different degrees, from the lowest possibility.

lity to the highest moral certainty. The evidence of revelation is confessedly no more than probable; to determine its sufficiency, we must examine the measure of that probability, with which it is attended.

Now History contains many facts which the most scrupulous sceptic will not deny; but it scarcely contains a single event, which is supported by proofs in any degree comparable with the weight of evidence, that has been transmitted to us, in favour of any one among the public miracles performed by our Saviour and his Apostles.

WE will instance the resurrection of Christ. The number of witnesses is thus represented by St. Paul. *He was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve; after that he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; after that he was seen of James, then of all*
the

*the Apostles, And last of all he was seen of me also *.*

WHAT is there short of impossibility, which the concurring testimony of so many competent and impartial witnesses would not establish?

THAT they were not deceived themselves, we have the most ample security, both in the temper of the men, the obstinacy of one, the enmity of another, and the incurable slowness of all; and also in the nature, number, and variety of the circumstances, under which their Lord appeared unto them; he conversed with them, ate with them, and wrought miracles before them; they saw him separately, and together; in the garden, and on their journies; at Jerusalem, and in Galilee, in the calm of religious assemblies, and

* 1 Cor. xv. 5, 6.

and in the hurry of their secular employments.

THAT they would not attempt to deceive others, is equally clear from their situation and character. What probability is there, that a set of ignorant, despised, and dispirited men, would undertake to correct the opinions of the Learned, and oppose the power of the Great? that they, who had weakly deserted their master, when living, would boldly revive his authority and doctrines, when dead? that they, who had been so cruelly disappointed in their rude expectations of a temporal kingdom, would suddenly conceive the extensive and refined idea of a spiritual and universal dominion?

EVEN on the supposition of its truth, the rapid success of a religion, so unwelcome to the prejudices, and so unfriendly

to

to the vices of the world, can be accounted for, only from the interposition of an overruling providence; on the supposition of its falsehood, its success can be accounted for on no principles.

A FACT, which was supported by such incontrovertible testimony, and followed by so many important consequences, which cannot be explained without admitting its reality, may surely be assented to with implicit confidence.

THE only contrary evidence, which was ever produced, is the vague and inconsistent report of the soldiers, who had been stationed to guard the sepulchre. But the authority of the Apostles and other disciples will suffer little from the contradiction of a set of men, who could not possibly be certain, of what they so boldly affirmed; and who must have been guilty,
either

either of a wilful falsehood, or a shameful neglect of the rules of their profession.

LET the credit of these men be incontestable, to what does their deposition really amount? that they themselves slept, and that the body of Jesus disappeared: but whether the resurrection were real, or only a contrivance of the disciples, was impossible for them, in their acknowledged situation, to determine.

THUS all, that the art or malice of the enemies of Christianity could oppose to the credibility of a fact, on which its existence depended, is the contemptible evidence of men, who appear from their own relation, unable to judge, and unworthy to be believed.

A SINGLE clear and well established miracle is to reason a sufficient proof of the
divine

divine interposition. But the Christian miracles were numerous and undoubted; they were wrought by plain simple men in defence of a religion, which was despised by the Learned, and opposed by the Powerful; they were wrought in the presence, and on the persons of enemies; the truth of most of them was never denied, and the falsehood of not one of them was ever proved.

To the miracles performed in support of Christianity must be added that wonderful series of connected prophecy, which was conducted with such consummate wisdom, that every age of the world affords some proof of its reality; and even the unbelieving Jews, at the same time, that they bore witness to its genuineness, and acknowledged its application to the Messiah, whom they expected, did also themselves contribute to its exact completion,

tion, in the very person, whom they opposed.

SUCH is the argument from testimony in favour of Christianity—we can scarcely conceive it possible to exist in greater strength: yet both the testimony of the Jews and that of the Apostles is in the present case supported also by another evidence of the most unsuspicious nature; the evidence arising from the uncontrollable order of events. The wonderful success of the Apostles confirms to us the truth of miracles: the unexampled sufferings of the Jews evince the reality of prophecy.

NOR is this all. These very events are also the accomplishments of predictions delivered by Christ himself; and supply us therefore, when considered in this view, with a further and distinct proof of his

G

divine

divine mission *. There is likewise another series of events no less extraordinary, which concurs in leading us to the same conclusion. For the Mosaic dispensation itself, and the whole history of the people, among whom it took place, is one perpetual miracle preparatory to the introduction of Christianity *.

THESE things evidently surpass all the measures of human power and contrivance: and if we believe, that there is a God, whose providence directs the world; we can never believe, that he would permit so great a part of his government to bear so strong and uniform testimony to any other cause, than that of religion and of truth.

STILL the scrupulous reason of some men is not satisfied: the merest cavil unanswered.

* These two arguments are more fully considered in the 2^d and 3^d of these Discourses.

answered, and the smallest doubt unre-
moved, cannot, it seems, be reconciled
with the obligations of God in revealing
his will.

Not to insist on the disrespectful free-
dom of such language, when applied to
such a Being; are there not, we may ask,
even in natural religion itself, as many and
as great difficulties? and may not the real
end and design of these bold reasoners, the
securing of man's final happiness, be in-
consistent with the preservation of the li-
berty of his conduct, which the asserters
of human dignity should of all men least
wish to part with? for that, in conse-
quence of this liberty, men do frequently
corrupt their nature with great and habi-
tual vices, we cannot deny; and, that the
happiness of such is consistent with justice,
or even with possibility, we cannot prove.

THAT God is obliged to give us the very strongest evidence to direct our actions, cannot be shewn from any principles of reason : but that he is not obliged, may be safely inferred from this plain fact, that he has no where given it.

THE prudential rules of common life, are all founded on the probability, that such a course of life will be attended with such or such consequences : and the most sacred precepts of natural religion are guarded by no other sanction than the probability, that in this life virtue will on the whole be productive of happiness ; and that the present disappointments and distresses of good men, how great or how many soever, will all be abundantly compensated hereafter, by the unmixed pleasures of an approving conscience, and the favour of a just God.

IF

IF then such be the lights, which before the introduction of Christianity were the sole guides of human conduct, and which are still its actual guides to great part of our species; to persist in asserting, that the supreme Being is from his nature bound to dispense more, or even so much, is surely neither modest, nor rational.

OUR extravagant expectations therefore, on this subject, are contradicted by every conclusion, that can be drawn from the usual conduct of the Deity in the government of the world: and they are also totally repugnant to the declared design of God in the promulgation of the Christian covenant.

RELIGION is constantly represented to us in a twofold view, as the object of our Faith, and as the rule of our Practice. Were then either its evidence, or its mo-

tives irresistible, it could not answer the ends of its appointment.

THAT the rewards and punishments, announced by the Gospel, are sufficient to engage every exertion of our nature, to obtain, or avoid them, is universally acknowledged; and yet the united force of both may be resisted: otherwise virtue and vice would be equally involuntary, merit and guilt unmeaning terms, and rewards and penalties the result of partiality and injustice.

To believe the Gospel, is uniformly required as an act of obedience, which will be rewarded; and which therefore may be, either performed, or neglected: for to command, what cannot be performed, is unjust; and to command what cannot but be performed, is at least unnecessary.

It

It is therefore in strict conformity with its design, that the evidence of the Gospel is, what it is; sufficiently clear to engage our belief, and yet not so powerful, as irresistibly to compel our assent.

THE sum of what has been said is this; that the proofs of Christianity are in the highest degree probable; and that we have no right no demand, and no reason to expect them to be more than probable.

To all reasonable men this kind of proof is a sufficient ground of belief; and if men will be unreasonable, it is difficult to fix on any, that would be sufficient: with respect to practice at least, *we know not, what we ask*; the light of superior evidence might shine in vain, or shine only to inflame our guilt: for, *if we bear not Moses and the prophets, neither should we be persuaded, though one rose from the dead,*

THE only methods, which the wisdom of God has adopted in revealing his will to mankind, are either immediate communications, or miracles, or testimony. The same revelation may be promulged and supported in the world by all these methods; original revelation informs the individual; miracles diffuse that knowledge through an intire age or nation; and the testimony of that age conveys the evidence, arising from those miracles, pure and uncorrupted to the latest posterity.

It may be doubted, whether any of these methods would effectually secure us against the attacks of prejudice and immorality. That testimony is to so great a degree ineffectual, is the very ground, on which our complaints are founded: and the history of the Jews will furnish us with numerous instances, in which the most splendid miracles, and even the voice

of

of God himself, were equally unsuccessful. They heard Christ speak, *as never man spake*; they saw his doctrines and pretensions confirmed by a magnificent display of miracles, which confessedly equalled, whatever they had expected or even imagined, in the character of their promised Messiah; they saw the lame run foremost in his train, the eye of the blind fixed in rapture on his divine benefactor, the tongue of the dumb loosed in hosannas to the Son of David, and even the dead themselves released from the imprisonment of the grave, to announce the power and mercy of their Redeemer.

ALL this they saw in vain; a bigoted attachment to their own law, and a sordid attention to their own interest, prompted them to reject the claims of a religion, which they feared would prove fatal to both.

Nor

Not had the Law of Moses, to which they were now so partial, originally met with a more grateful reception. The voice of God on Sinai, a series of miracles, unexampled in the history of mankind, wrought for their preservation and defence, and a succession of prophecies, some of which they saw closely followed by their event, and others gradually fulfilling on themselves and on their enemies, were all unable to correct their unaccountable propensity to the absurdities of idol-worship.

SUCH was the conduct of the Jewish nation, and such might probably have been the conduct of any other people, if placed in the same circumstances: for surely the corruptions of the Jews will not be ascribed to any peculiarity of temper, if similar corruptions be found among Christians of the present age; who may be supposed to possess advantages in the superior

superior cultivation of their reason, at least sufficient to counterbalance the disadvantage, arising from this circumstance in their religion; that it is no longer confirmed by present miracles, or taught by inspired men.

THE prevailing faults of the Jews were, idolatry, too high an opinion of ceremonies, too low an one of morals, and a contempt and aversion for other nations.

AND are there not Christians too, who are idolatrous, if not to the same degree with the Jews, yet in a degree, which is equally forbidden? are there not, who substitute faith in the place of virtue, or who think by the ceremonies of penance to expiate the guilt of immoralities? and have not Christians treated the Jews with as much contempt, and persecuted even their own brethren with as much real hatred,

as

as a Jew could possibly feel for a heathen? Or if the latter species of intolerance have gradually declined among us, may it not be imputed, among other causes, to the prevalence of a fault, which the Jews were never charged with, an indifference to all religion?

FROM the example then of the people of Israel, we may now venture to draw this general conclusion, that the obedience of man will by no means increase in proportion to the evidence of his religion.

THE Infidel, directed only by the lamp of reason, may sometimes tread those heights of moral excellence, which even the Believer, whom *the day-spring from on high bath visited*, will often fail to reach; and the same light of revelation, which blazed from its very source with unheeded glory on the Jew, after being transmitted through
many

many an age of darkness, still shines with ample, though diminished, lustre, to guide and animate the hopes and virtues of the Christian.

BUT as the argument from history will have little weight with those, who are under the dominion of national or religious prejudice; the effects of removing the objections to religion shall be gathered from reason as well as experience. And if we bear in mind, what we have already seen, that the evidences of religion are on the whole sufficient; I am persuaded, we shall find, that this favourite measure is attended with no peculiar advantages, from which we can form any sanguine expectations of its success.

FOR as the generality of men have no doubts on this subject, the beneficial influence of superior religious evidence on
the

the conduct of human life must be fought for, not so much in the great body of mankind, as among men of cultivated understandings and contemplative minds. And with regard to these, Immorality can be no otherwise connected with religious doubts, than as it is, either the cause of them, or their effect. Now certainly so far as it is the cause of these doubts, no addition to the proofs of revelation has any tendency to lessen it. Of the other part of the proposition, which makes Immorality the consequence of religious doubts, the Truth is very questionable. For if Immorality were their natural effect, it would receive from them at least some colour of excuse. But the obligations of Christianity, we are sure, subsist firm and entire under all the difficulties with which it is attended: for its evidence, notwithstanding these difficulties, though not irresistible, is, we must remember, still sufficient.

Now,

Now, if we refuse to believe on sufficient evidence, it must plainly be owing to the influence of some unreasonable prejudice or passion: and if we refuse to act on such evidence, it certainly cannot be shewn from any rational principles, that the very strongest would induce us to reform our conduct. For our obligation to act, depends as much on the value of the object, we have in view, as on the likelihood of our success. When therefore the object proposed to our ambition is of infinite and eternal moment; our obligation to pursue it will be equally real, let the hope of attainment be ever so small: nor would even the force of the obligation be materially changed, by the inconsiderable additions, which could be made, to the probability of that evidence, on which our belief is founded. The difficulties in Religion therefore, as they take nothing from the reality of its motives, and surely not much

much from their weight and efficacy, cannot be charged with any powerful tendency to produce or favour Immorality.

ACCORDINGLY, of the vices, which overrun the world, few are in fact derived from this source. Men run into vicious excesses, not from the weakness of Religion to influence their belief, but the weakness of reason to control their passions: if any uncertainty in Religion contribute to this effect; it is the uncertainty not so much of its proofs as its sanctions: it is the flattering hope, which men always retain, of avoiding its punishments, of atoning for their sins by repentance, or retrieving the misconduct of the present moment, by the happier diligence of some future hour.

WHILE passion can thus hurry us away, in contradiction to the clearest principles
of

of reason, and the most awful lessons of experience, no wonder we are deaf to the most persuasive arguments of religion. The defect is wholly in ourselves: the precepts of revelation are liable to no objections; and were its proofs also accompanied with no difficulties, the disorders in the moral world, it is probable, would be rather changed, than remedied.

For such are our prejudices, that it may be questioned, whether all the force of the very strongest evidence would constantly and entirely convince our understandings; and such are our habits, that its effect on our hearts and manners would be still more precarious. Instances might occur, in which it would prevent our deviating from the line of duty, how often, or how seldom we know not; but this we do know, it would aggravate the guilt of every sin, which it failed to prevent, and

H

would

would unavoidably preclude the exertion of many virtues. For candour, fairness, humility of mind, and every other moral quality, which is displayed and strengthened by the proper conduct of the understanding, would then be deprived of all the opportunities, which can excite them to action and improvement.

It appears therefore, that difficulties in religion are so far from real imperfections, that they render it better calculated to promote the virtue and the happiness of those, whom it was intended to govern: for if they be sometimes the cause of infidelity, they are also the sole foundation of merit in our belief; they probably lessen the quantity of guilt, that would be contracted; and they certainly increase the degree of virtue, that may be attained.

INSTEAD

INSTEAD therefore of projecting improvements in the system of divine government, a visionary and dangerous speculation, which can have no possible end, but to bewilder our minds, and perplex our morals; it were our wisdom to consider, not whether Religion correspond with our expectations, but how far our reason has attended to its proofs, our understandings submitted to its authority, and our conduct been directed by its laws.



Instead therefore of producing the
 improvements in the system of distribution
 necessary to a visionary and dangerous pro-
 position, which can have no possible end
 but to bewilder our minds, and thereby
 our interests, it were our wisest course
 to let not whether Religion correspond
 with our expectations, but how far our
 reason has strayed to its proper, our un-
 derstandings debilitated, to its authority
 and our conduct been directed by its laws.

MATTH. x. 34.

THINK NOT THAT I AM COME TO SEND
PEACE ON EARTH; I CAME NOT TO SEND
PEACE, BUT A SWORD.

TO prepare the minds of his disciples
to support with firmness the diffi-
culties and the dangers of the great office,
which they had so readily undertaken, but
of which they yet so little knew the nature;
Jesús in these words does not describe the
end, to the accomplishment of which their
labours were to be directed, but forewarns
them of the effect, with which those la-
bours would unhappily be but too often
attended: that they must not expect to sit
down in the peaceful enjoyment of the
honours and riches of a temporal king-
dom, nor even to find the world attentive

to their admonitions, or grateful for their instructions: that the contrary to all this would very generally take place, and they, like their master, in the discharge of their important duty, would be deserted, betrayed, and persecuted: nor would the measure of affliction be exhausted in their sufferings; the preaching of the Gospel of peace would be as it were the universal signal for the most inveterate and unnatural divisions; in which the closest ties of kindred and friendship would be dissolved, *the Father would be divided against the son, and the son against the father, and a man's foes be they of his own household.*

THIS Prophecy, whether it be confined to the times of the Apostles and first converts, to the painful sacrifice they made at the Christian altar, of whatever in this life is either valuable or delightful; or it be further extended to the divisions, which
in

in every succeeding age have harrassed and disgraced the church of Christ; in either of these senses, even the enemies of Christianity must own it to have been amply fulfilled by the event. And it seems to require considerable art to evade the claim of prescience, which is founded on the prediction of facts so strange and unlikely; as that on the appearance of a Religion, which breathed nothing but peace and submission, the Roman Government would suddenly forget and abandon their hitherto undeviating maxims of toleration; or that the meekness and benevolence of the Christian System could possibly be so far perverted, as to produce effects more pernicious than any, which had ever been experienced from the most cruel and abject superstitions.

BUT, allowing the accomplishment of this prediction to be a full proof of the

Prophet's discernment; is it, we may ask, quite reconcileable with those descriptions, in which the kingdom of the Messiah is elsewhere represented, where universal innocence is the character of his subjects, and universal peace their reward?

It may be answered, that these prophecies refer to different events, which were to take place in different periods of the Christian Church: the first points out the violent opposition, which would impede its rise, from the power of heathens; as well as the more disgraceful obstructions, which would afterwards interrupt its progress, from the vices of believers: while the others describe to us its real and true tendency; and direct our hopes to the future scenes of glory and triumph, that will one day succeed to this mixed state of vice and apostacy, of division and distress, which the first preachers of the Gos-

pel

pel foretold and lamented, and which its adversaries in every age have vainly represented as inconsistent with its heavenly origin.

It was certainly a bright period in the history of Christianity, when its advocates could boldly appeal, in proof of its divine original, to the effects, that attended its progress, and the virtues, that sprang up under its steps: when the vices, which the wisdom of the Philosopher could not correct, and the power of the Magistrate could not control, had fled from the rebuke of a few simple, unlettered Fishermen: and when the utmost ingenuity and malice of its opponents was challenged to detect a single instance of profligacy in a mixed croud of unnumbered profelytes.

If we turn our eyes from this picture of primitive excellence, how are we confounded

founded to find, that the vices of succeeding times have at length almost reversed the conclusion; and the same argument now pleads with specious eloquence against that religion, which it once supported with real strength, and recommended with irresistible persuasion.

BUT it must always be remembered, that the nature and force of these proofs are widely different. The one represents the genuine effects of Religion in its proper and avowed province of directing the passions, and reforming the morals of mankind: while the other displays the accidental consequences, which followed, when its Spirit was debased and perverted by the very passions, which it was designed to purify and govern: when the Gospel of peace was made the instrument of war and faction; and the zeal of Christians extirpated

pated those, whom Christianity taught them to love.

We are indeed assured, that *false prophets shall be known by their fruits**; by the manifest and essential tendency, by the real and constant effects of the doctrines they teach, and the precepts they inculcate; but this method of arguing bears not the smallest resemblance to that, which would condemn religion, not from its natural fruits, but merely from the abuses and perversions of it; from the crimes, which are contrary to its general temper, as well as to its positive commands. No institution has ever prevented all the excesses, which it forbid: nor is it peculiar to the Laws of Religion, that they have sometimes furnished a pretext for the introduction of those very evils and oppressions, which they were originally intended to remedy.

It

* Matth. vii. 16.

It must needs be, that offences come, but woe unto that man, by whom the offence cometh *. Now part of the offence and of the woe must belong, not only to those, who by their unworthy deeds have given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme †; but to those also, who, though perfectly sensible of the unfairness of the argument we are considering, have yet so artfully confounded the public history of the church with the genuine effects of Religion, and the spirit of superstition and fanaticism with the genius of Christianity, that it is not every careless reader, who will perceive or attend to the distinction between them, however obvious and however necessary. Nor are those without their share of blame, who carry on their insidious and concealed attack, by perpetually recurring to the tragical display of those wars, conspiracies, and persecutions, those mingled scenes of guilt and horror, which,

* Matth. xviii. 7. † 2 Sam. xii. 14.

which, could they be justly imputed to either, would be equally disgraceful to religion or to reason.

THESE arts are very disingenuous, and at the same time very successful; they insensibly interest the feelings of men in a cause, which ought to be left to the cool decision of the understanding; and they fix on weak minds an unfavourable impression, in which reason has no share, and which yet no subsequent reflection shall ever be able wholly to efface.

WERE it possible for us to trace up events, each to its proper cause, and refer the several actions of men to their real and distinct motives; or were it as easy to discern the genuine effects of Christianity on the minds of those, who have sincerely obeyed its directions, as it is to darken its character with all the crimes and all the follies

It must needs be, that offences come, but woe unto that man, by whom the offence cometh *. Now part of the offence and of the woe must belong, not only to those, who by their unworthy deeds have *given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme* †; but to those also, who, though perfectly sensible of the unfairness of the argument we are considering, have yet so artfully confounded the public history of the church with the genuine effects of Religion, and the spirit of superstition and fanaticism with the genius of Christianity, that it is not every careless reader, who will perceive or attend to the distinction between them, however obvious and however necessary. Nor are those without their share of blame, who carry on their insidious and concealed attack, by perpetually recurring to the tragical display of those wars, conspiracies, and persecutions, those mingled scenes of guilt and horror, which,

* Matth. xviii. 7. † 2 Sam. xii. 14.

which, could they be justly imputed to either, would be equally disgraceful to religion or to reason.

THESE arts are very disingenuous, and at the same time very successful; they insensibly interest the feelings of men in a cause, which ought to be left to the cool decision of the understanding; and they fix on weak minds an unfavourable impression, in which reason has no share, and which yet no subsequent reflection shall ever be able wholly to efface.

WERE it possible for us to trace up events, each to its proper cause, and refer the several actions of men to their real and distinct motives; or were it as easy to discern the genuine effects of Christianity on the minds of those, who have sincerely obeyed its directions, as it is to darken its character with all the crimes and all the follies

follics of those, who in every age have transgressed its laws, misunderstood its temper, or perverted its design; we should then be enabled to form a just judgement of the real importance of Religion to the virtue and happiness of society: and the enquiry would certainly terminate in a complete vindication of the general utility of the Christian System, and would shew that its effects have been really such, as, if they do not amount to a formal proof of its truth, are at least perfectly consistent with it.

EVEN without wishing to commence our researches with any such extraordinary advantages, whoever will attentively compare the morals of Christians, defective as they are, with those of the heathen nations in similar stages of society, will be readily convinced, that the effects of Christianity have not been inconsiderable.

THE

THE vices of antiquity, it is well known, were many of them forbidden by no law of the Community, and condemned by no precept of Philosophy; nay, some were not silently permitted, but highly and universally applauded: they therefore may with some justice be imputed to the rude and imperfect state of moral and religious knowledge. But the vices of a Christian are all of them forbidden by his Religion; and consequently, though attended with deeper guilt in the individual, who commits them, can with no colour of propriety be charged as a blemish to the institution, by which they are prohibited: and who would hesitate to prefer the principle, which always forbids, though it does not always prevent sins, to that, which does not even forbid them?

THERE is also some hope, that the guide of conduct, which constantly points out
the

the path of virtue, how long soever neglected, will at last be attended to; that the influences of Christianity, after being strangely counteracted, will at length discover their true tendency in the gradual improvement of human manners.

EVEN the present age, when every allowance has been made for its acknowledged deficiencies, may perhaps be thought to afford some vestiges of the possibility at least of this desirable event.

As to the complaints of increasing degeneracy, which have been eagerly repeated in every successive generation, in general they are founded only on partial and confined observation, and in particular instances they are frequently nothing more than the mere effusions of passion, and may be seen to proceed from private discontent, from a melancholic disposition
of

of mind, or from an unfavourable opinion of human nature itself: they cannot have been always true; they often must have been, and therefore may be now, groundless and unjust.

IF we cannot perhaps assert of the present times, that the crimes of men are less frequent; they are however certainly much less malignant, and seldom attended with the same degree of violence, or aggravated with an equal variety of atrocious circumstances.

MANY of our duties, especially those connected with benevolence and moderation, are confessedly both better understood and more generally practised. The influence of Charity in particular, as it is displayed in the relief of infirmity and want, has been extended far beyond, not only the usual practice, but even the

I

most

most romantic conceptions of any former period.

CHARITABLE foundations have in this nation been always numerous: if the joint effect of them all, as they now subsist among us, be fairly considered, the foregoing observation will hardly seem exaggerated: and if the institutions of the present be compared with those of any preceding age, it will, I think, appear, that the former have in many respects an evident superiority; that a greater number of persons, and of persons really distressed, are relieved by them, that a greater number of individuals contribute to their support, and that they are more frequently maintained by living benefactors. From these circumstances, it should seem, there is sufficient ground to conclude, that the beneficial consequences of the modern establishments are more extensive; there is reason to believe, that the

the principle of humanity on which they are founded is more general; and there is some presumption also; that it is more genuine.

It is owing to the increasing prevalence of the same principle; that the general temper of men has gradually lost that pride and fierceness, that bitterness and rancour; which we see so dreadfully exemplified in the history of our own and other nations: and for instances of which we need only to refer to the perpetual feuds of the darker ages; which ran through whole families, and desolated successive generations; or to the religious animosities both of earlier and of later times, in which the passions of men were often raised to as destructive an height by an almost imperceptible difference of opinions, as they have ever been carried by the rudest interference of contending interests.

To these examples of actual improvement may be added some other circumstances, which seem to point out the present advancement of human virtue, and are certainly favourable to its further progress. I mean that general sense of propriety, that attention to external appearances, and that decent respect which is at least commonly paid to the feelings and sentiments of virtuous men. These are circumstances in which the conduct of life is evidently improving; though of the degree, to which it is already improved, there may doubtless be many different opinions. They are circumstances too, which will probably be referred to very different causes: but they cannot be exclusively ascribed to the single influence either of religion or of manners; because they appear to have been equally unknown in the ruder ages of Christianity, and in the most polished periods of heathen antiquity.

It

It has also been frequently observed, and I think it an additional instance of the moral effects of Christianity, that to its assistance we are indebted for that more accurate knowledge of natural religion, which has at length traced out a rational and consistent system. To Christianity therefore, in part at least, must be attributed the virtues even of those men, who forgetful of the source, from which the best lights of reason are derived, have ungratefully, as well as ignorantly, rejected the clearer light of revelation.

In estimating the effects of Religion on the public welfare of communities, we are peculiarly apt to overlook the happiness, and observe only the miseries, of which it has been apparently the cause. Nor is this owing solely to the temper and constitution of man, who sits down indolently contented with his good fortune, without

any curious enquiries to trace out the source, from which it flows; while the least feeling, or even fear of pain, will make him anxiously alive to discover the cause of the evil, and the means to avert its approach, or escape its return. For the blessings produced by religion are the less conspicuous also on another account; because they are produced silently and peaceably, without any extraordinary effort, and in the natural and general order of events; while the evils ascribed to it, on the contrary, are usually interruptions of that order, they spring out of particular conjunctures, and arise not from the single and constant agency of religion, but from the mixture of its powerful influences with the passions and interests of men.

To this observation however there are some illustrious exceptions. Thus of the two events we this day commemorate, if
one

one is to be considered as a perpetual memorial of the atrocious effects, which may be produced by superstition and misguided zeal; the other is an instance no less remarkable of the signal efficacy, with which the desire of religious freedom has concurred in the assertion and establishment of civil liberty. At the era of the revolution, the security of religion was undoubtedly the primary object of contention: and it has been made a question, whether the spirit of the people could have been then effectually roused to the defence of their civil rights, if the imprudence of James had not at the same time touched a more tender string, in the open invasion of their religious privileges.

AGAIN, Christianity has contributed, in how great a degree we know not, to the service of human learning.

It is a fact which cannot be disputed, that during the long night of intellectual darkness, the institutions of religion were the only means, which kept in existence the monuments of ancient genius, and thus hastened at least, if they did not produce, the most interesting event, that ever took place in any part of the known world, I mean the revival of letters.

THE religious disputes also, which at that period absorbed the whole attention of mankind, if they had no tendency to soften the temper, or improve the taste, if they retarded the cultivation of science, and for a time at least prevented the union of elegance with learning; yet did they impress the productions of that and the succeeding ages with another, and perhaps not less valuable character; they called forth and exercised the spirit of patient investigation and bold enquiry; and are

among the more active causes, which gradually produced that perpetual vein of good sense, of acute discrimination, and of correct and manly reasoning, which forms the distinguishing excellence of modern literature.

FURTHER, if the worst causes of the worst effects have been in these later ages either totally removed, or in part at least disarmed of their power and virulence; if the cruelty of Tyranny be abated, if War have lost much of its savage fierceness, if the subject can repose in security beneath the rod of arbitrary sway, and the voice of humanity be heard amidst the shout of battle; if the institution of domestic servitude, which overspread the whole ancient world, have been entirely banished from these kingdoms, and be comparatively at least but little known in most parts of Christian Europe; if the guilty

com-

commerce, which has so long desolated one quarter of the Globe, have been strenuously, though hitherto, with grief it must be owned, not very successfully attacked by the generous efforts of wise and good men, supported by an almost unexampled concurrence of all ranks, and sects, and parties*; to what cause can we have recourse, unless to the more diffusive prevalence of the liberal and benevolent spirit, which breathes through the christian system of Religion? And if it be the peculiar blessing of the present times, to hear no more of religious persecutions, religious wars, and all the detestable excesses of pious phrenzy; what can we infer, but that the genius of our profession is at length better understood, and some at least of its commands are more generally obeyed?

To

* This Sermon was written not long after the Act of Parliament was passed for regulating the African Trade.

To conclude. The calamities consequent on the wickedness of Christians, can certainly bring no just imputation on the credit of a religion, which, had it been duly obeyed, would have effectually prevented both: and on the other hand, it must be acknowledged, that the good effects of Christianity, though they contain many and evident marks of its importance and real usefulness, do yet, in the present imperfect state of earthly virtue, by no means amount to a demonstration of its truth. It is an argument however, of which we have it always in our own power to lessen or increase the force: and how irresistible its energy may prove, when the lives of Christians shall correspond with the purity and innocence of their profession, may in part be conceived. For even the coldness of Philosophy could scarcely refuse to listen with candour, if not with partiality, to the claims of a Revelation,

the

the effects of which were so amiable, and every way so consonant to its pretended origin: and how lost must that man be to the sense of ambition as well as virtue, who did not enter with eager steps on the pursuit of that excellence, which was in fact seen, to lie within the reach of human industry, and to be constantly conducive to the improvement and happiness of human nature,

SUCH is the extent of that power, with which example recommends religion; it confirms our faith, it animates and improves our virtues. Of these effects the latter is acknowledged by every Moralist: and they both are united in the motive proposed to our conduct by the great Saviour of the world; *who knew what was in man*, and therefore, though never an encourager of outward and ostentatious piety, disdained not to invite imitation to the

the aid of reason, and represent the bright influence of an attractive example as the best illustration of the proofs and precepts of religion; *Let your Light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father, which is in heaven* *.

* Matth. v. 16.



the

I COR. ii. 16.

FOR WHO HATH KNOWN THE MIND OF THE
LORD, THAT HE MAY INSTRUCT HIM?
BUT WE HAVE THE MIND OF CHRIST.

THE dissensions, which prevail among
Christians, have given piety its deepest
wound, and infidelity its proudest triumphs. It may abate our wonder at the
appearance of these divisions, though it
cannot lessen our concern, to reflect, that
the seeds of Christianity were scarcely sown,
when the enemy began to sow his tares;
that the spirit of discord, which the learning
and temper of modern times have been
unable to overcome, had gone forth in the
earliest ages of the Christian church, and
had ventured to attack the most eloquent
of the Apostles, though not only adorned
with superior knowledge, but armed with
the

the power of miracles, and directed by the voice of inspiration.

THE disputes, which reigned in the church of Corinth, had split the believers into many different sects; which, in the true spirit of faction, had disguised their real unity of sentiment, by classing themselves under different names, and affecting each of them to be the follower of a particular Leader; *one saying I am of Paul, another I am of Apollos, and I of Cephas, and I of Christ**: while many of them openly opposed the authority of the Apostle himself; and to diminish his credit with the multitude, who are always much led by external circumstances, objected that *his bodily presence was weak, and his speech contemptible†*.

THE former of these, who prided themselves on the fancied superiority of their favourite

* 1 Cor. i. 12. † 2 Cor. x. 10.

favourite teachers, are reminded by the Apostle, that in the heat of their ill judged contests; they had not only mistaken the spirit of their religion, but betrayed the dignity of its author: that Christ alone, by whose sufferings they were redeemed, and in whose name they were baptized, was their real Head and Governor; and that himself and the other preachers of the Gospel, whatever were their labours, or their success, could be intitled to no higher regard, than was due to them as the servants and ministers of Christ. *Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul*? Who is Paul, or who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed†?*

To the latter, whose opposition was directed against himself, he observes, that the accomplishments and learning, which they

* 1 Cor. i. 13.

† 1 Cor. iii. 5.

they so greatly admired, how estimable soever in themselves, made no necessary part of the character of an Apostle; that the persons, whom Christ had chosen, were plain simple men, undistinguished by any advantages of earthly rank or wisdom; and were from that very circumstance enabled to execute the great purpose, for which they were chosen, in the way, which though in itself less promising, was most consonant to the divine intention: that his religion might be so far from owing any part of its success to human power or persuasion, as to obtain the more glorious triumph of having prevailed over the united opposition of them both. “ *For God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things that are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought*

nought things that are." The Apostle proceeds to inform the Corinthian Converts, that in conformity with the intentions of his divine Master, he had also himself come to them, not with excellency of speech or wisdom†; that he had not attempted to allure them with the charms of eloquence, or amuse them with the refinements of Philosophy; but had placed the proofs of the mission of Christ on their true basis, on the predictions which he had fulfilled, and on the miracles, which he both had wrought himself, and had enabled his Apostles to perform; that their faith might stand, not in the wisdom of man, but in the demonstration of the spirit, and in the power of God‡.*

AND as the evidences of Christianity were not rested on the frail support of eloquence or learning, neither were its doctrines

* 1 Cor. i. 27, 28.

† 1 Cor. ii. 1.

‡ 1 Cor. ii. 4, 5.

trines discoverable by the strongest efforts of human reason: *the hidden wisdom of God* in the redemption of the world by a crucified Saviour, far from being discovered, was not even received by the Masters of human learning; the mortifying doctrine was *unto the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness**; it disappointed the false hopes of the one, and it contradicted the proud reasonings of the other.

Nor is this the only doctrine which has been thus misunderstood, on that the only age, which has ventured to oppose the directions of reason to the dictates of revelation. There was indeed a period of the Christian Church, when men were ready to sacrifice the plainest suggestions of the understanding to what were obtruded on them, without even the form of proof, as the doctrines of religion. But the days of ignorant submission are long since passed, and

* 1 Cor. i. 23.

and we have now to guard ourselves from a danger of another kind. The present age has been distinguished by an anxious solicitude to reconcile the apparent disagreements of revelation and reason; happy had it never been disgraced by pernicious attempts to accommodate the contents of the former to the rash and uncertain conclusions of the latter. The doctrines of Religion have been examined with an accuracy, which might have been equally laudable and successful, had not the design of adjusting their true meaning and limits been too frequently counteracted by a secret wish to obtain support for the opinions and prejudices of an individual, or for the favourite tenets of a sect.

WHILE then the views, upon which our enquiries are instituted, and the dispositions, with which they are conducted, are so widely different, we cannot wonder, if

the same difference discover itself also in the conclusion of our researches.

To pursue religious enquiries with success is the peculiar province, as the Apostle informs us, of the *spiritual man**; of one, who being fully convinced of the reality of revelation, is ever willing to submit to its authority. He knows that revelation, though it cannot possibly contradict reason, may yet speak, where she is silent; may teach, where she is ignorant; correct, where she is deceived; and decide, where she is uncertain: he will therefore never be led, from any false and foolish notions of consulting the honour of religion, either to involve the plainest passages of scripture in darkness and mystery, or to reduce its sublimest truths to the level of his own conceptions. Other modes of reasoning can only furnish a display of talents and of pride — of talents vainly employed — and

* 1 Cor. ii. 14, 15.

and of pride, which will own nothing, even in the boundless system of divine government, to be too remote for its researches, too minute for its inspection, or too vast for its comprehension. But *who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him?* The Apostle in these words has applied to the dispensation of Religion, what the Prophet * had before observed of the natural and moral government of God. Both of them contain circumstances, which we cannot comprehend, and difficulties, which we cannot explain; nor are the expectations of reason more frequently contradicted by the doctrines of the one, than by the facts and events, which take place in the other. And if the Moralist, amidst the obscurities and difficulties, which every where surrounded him, was bound to acquiesce with cheerful reliance on the wisdom and mercy of God; surely we, who *have the mind of*

W. B. R.

K 4

Christ,

* See Is. xl. 13.

Christ, who are blessed with clearer light and nobler prospects to direct and animate our Faith, shall be more deeply culpable, if we fail under a trial of the same sort, which only requires from us the same candour of mind and the same submission of the understanding.

WE ought therefore to preserve in our religious enquiries a due reverence for the authority of revealed religion, as well as a just sense both of the power and weakness of human faculties; guarding ourselves with equal care from prepossessions of every kind, from whatever source they are derived, whether from an unreasonable attachment to our own conceptions, or a blind acquiescence in the sentiments of others, from the capricious love of novelty, or the excessive distrust of ancient and received opinions.

WERE

WERE we required to point out the particular doctrine of Christianity, which has given the largest scope, both to the perversion of reason, and the abuse of revelation; none would perhaps more readily occur to the minds of most men, than that connected with the event of this day; that, I mean, which encourages the sincere believer in every age to hope, that his virtues will not only be rewarded in the future dispensations of God, but confirmed and improved by the present assistance of his directing Spirit.

UNDOUBTEDLY no part of Religion has been more disfigured by human additions and inventions. The simplicity of this doctrine has been destroyed by minute and unintelligible distinctions, involved in abstruse reasoning, and disguised in obscure and unauthorised language; it has furnished a pretext for the
indolence

indolence of some men, and the crimes of others; it has been misrepresented in the wild notions of one party, and its very end and design have been perverted by the daring excesses of another. These circumstances may demand our caution, but afford no reason, that we should either dissemble, or deny the truth: for the abuse of a principle is no argument against either its reality or its use. That the Creator can assist the moral pursuits of his creatures must be true: and that he will assist them, if it be not a suggestion of unaided reason, must certainly be the first wish of imperfect virtue. The want of direction in our present state of weakness and danger is a fact, of which the best men have ever been the most deeply sensible: and reason itself must own the probability at least, that the Author of Good will communicate to his creatures a blessing, which is loudly demanded by their nature,

e

and

and no way inconsistent with their probation.

BUT whatever obscurity might dwell on the minds of other men; the hope of a Christian is *sure and stedfast*, not founded on a few detached passages of Scripture only, but confirmed by the general turn and tenor of the Gospel, and woven into the very substance and texture of his Religion. Christ assures his disciples of the presence of *another comforter*, in terms, which plainly lead us to conclude, that the same consolation and support will be extended in every age to all those, *who love him and keep his commandments*, and that *if the world receive it not*, the only reason is their own impenitence and unbelief*. The comparison used in the following passage places the certainty of such help in a stronger light, than any affirmation could do: *If ye then, being evil, know how*

to

* John xiv. 15, 16, 17.

to give good gifts to your children; much more shall your heavenly Father give the holy Spirit to them that ask him*. And this is a petition, which we are not only encouraged by the promise of success, but obliged by a positive command, to make: for when we pray that God would deliver us from evil, we ask, not that he would exempt us from temptations, for that, so far as it is the proper object of our prayers, is the subject of another petition, but that he would help and support us under them. *The heart of man is in the hand of God*: his power is unlimited, but the exertion of it is regulated by the conduct of his creatures, and the nature and ends of his moral government. Those who believe and obey, he can *make perfect, establish, strengthen, settle*; he *renews a right spirit* in the breast of the returning penitent; and the obstinately vicious he finally gives over to the suggestions of a reprobate

* Luke xi. 13.

reprobate mind, and the lusts of their own heart.

WE are instructed to pray for temporal blessings, for the favour of heaven to prosper our virtuous industry: we pray too, for the same reason and with the same hope of success, for assistance in our moral pursuits. In each of these respects, the divine support is equally wanted, is promised with equal clearness, and is communicated by the same overruling providence, which without any visible interposition, leads us to happiness, or directs us to virtue.

THAT we are not sensible of the protection in the one case, or of the direction in the other, should not be made an argument against one, any more than the other. The reason of this obscurity may perhaps be the same, both in the communication

munication of spiritual, and in the distribution of temporal blessings; we at least cannot decide, how far the evil, if it be one, could in the present instance be avoided, consistently with the scheme of our probation, and with that freedom of the human will, without which the care of heaven might make us happy, but nothing could possibly make us virtuous.

BUT it may be thought, that, however ignorant we may be of the mode of its operation, yet the effects of the divine influence must be clear and prominent. To see the danger of arguing from partial appearances and unauthorised suppositions, we need only apply the same reasoning in other instances. Thus we cannot always in our present state distinguish between the events, which result from human actions, from the order of nature, or from the immediate agency of God; but must

we

we therefore conclude, that there is no Providence which governs the world? Thus also it must be acknowledged, that the effects of Religion on human manners, are in great numbers not discernible; are in others inconsiderable; and in all much less than might be reasonably expected: but is there therefore any imperfection in Religion itself, any want of proof to engage our belief, of precepts to direct our conduct, or of motives to persuade our compliance?

FURTHER, in estimating the measure and effect of the assistance granted to man, we are to consider, not what the power of God can accomplish, but what the nature and exigencies of moral agents will admit or require: and may therefore hope, not for such interpositions, as will suddenly and irresistibly annihilate the force of long prejudice and confirmed habit; but for that

that direction and support, which may enable us with patient efforts to carry on the gradual work of reformation and improvement. Its object is not the absolute prevention of vice, but the encouragement and protection of willing, though weak and imperfect virtue. Our own endeavours are constantly presupposed; where no endeavours are made, no assistance can be expected: and it is surely not irrational to impute to some peculiar blessing, that in the pursuits of duty, and in those only, the serious and persevering endeavours of man are never unsuccessful.

If then it has been shewn, and there is scarcely a page of scripture, which would not add some confirmation to the proofs already given, that Revelation asserts the power of God over the human heart, and assures us, that that power will be exerted to guide and support us in the

the paths of duty; it is vain to oppose the mere ignorance of reason to the express declarations of religion: especially when that ignorance not only is derived from the nature of the subject, and the weakness of our faculties, but may also, for any thing we know, be necessarily connected with the methods of the divine government, and form an essential part of the scheme of our probation.

To conclude. It must excite in us the liveliest apprehensions of the importance of human conduct, when we reflect on the diversity of means employed in its direction. Nature has implanted in us the sentiment of duty; and Religion has illustrated and enforced her suggestions, by the purity of its great example, the light of its instructions, and the weight of its authority: the present state of things is adapted to the trial and improvement of

L

virtue,

virtue, and the future is reserved for its reward : and that no gracious provision might be wanting for the weakness and errors of nature, the dispensation of Christ has promised the pardon of God to repentant sinners, and his assistance to their sincere endeavours. The last is a circumstance particularly suited to the various exigencies of our situation ; because it is capable of being proportioned, which our natural faculties could not be, to the different degrees of temptation and danger ; and whether we have attained to considerable excellence, or be involved in peculiar difficulties, the certainty of relief will keep us from irresolution, and the sense of its necessity will guard us from presumption—from presumption, which is ever on the edge of danger—and irresolution, which has nothing of religion but its scruples, which mistakes fear for caution, and inactivity for virtue. *Now unto him that is*
able

able to keep us from falling, and to present us faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy; to the only wise God our Saviour be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen.



7

the first of January, 1800, the
republican government of the city
of New York, in the name of the
people, do hereby declare that the
rights of the people are hereby
guaranteed, and no other laws
shall be made, but such as shall
be consistent with the principles
of the constitution.

—

I COR. XV. 22.

AS IN ADAM ALL DIE; EVEN SO IN CHRIST
SHALL ALL BE MADE ALIVE.

IT is a remarkable circumstance in the constitution of this world, that the effects of malevolence are more certain and more extensive than those of the kinder affections. Whatever we may hope or think of the inclinations of men, it is undoubtedly much more in their power to give pain than pleasure, to produce misery than happiness. But how closely soever this unfortunate privilege may be connected with the imperfection of human nature, or wisely accommodated to the probation of accountable creatures; it is surely little consistent with our ideas

of infinite wisdom and goodness, to imagine that the same prevalence of evil pervades the whole of the divine government; that the inflictions of justice have been very imperfectly counterbalanced by the effects of the beloved attribute of mercy; that the fall of Adam has entailed its bitter consequences in different degrees on the whole species, while the redemption wrought by Jesus Christ, being revealed to a comparatively small part of mankind, and disregarded or abused by very many even of those, who acknowledge its importance, cannot in any sense be said to have communicated blessings equivalent to the mischiefs it was appointed to repair.

To the sincere believer indeed this difficulty, when taken in its utmost strength, is by no means insuperable: he contemplates by the eye of faith that remote and blissful period, when the glory of God,
and

and the veracity of his prophets, shall be fully displayed in the final and perfect establishment of *pure and undefiled religion*; when *all men shall know the Lord, from the least to the greatest**; when *they shall not hurt or destroy in all God's holy mountain*†; and the Lord God shall wipe away tears from off all faces‡; and the voice of weeping shall no more be heard, nor the voice of crying §.

BUT without having recourse to expectations, which, however solidly grounded, are not yet realised; it may be observed, that the advantages held out by the Christian system are many and obvious; and if its real effects on those, who confess its authority, be less than might have reasonably been expected, the difficulty is not peculiar to revelation; it presses at least equally

* Jer. xxxi. 34.

† Is. lxv. 25.

‡ Is. xxv. 8.

§ Is. lxv. 19.

equally on natural religion; and therefore must be resolved into an additional melancholy instance of our own degeneracy, rather than insisted on as an argument of any want of wisdom or kindness in the scheme of our redemption.

THIS observation will of itself amount to a complete vindication of the divine conduct in this particular; if it shall appear further, that the blessings of redemption are not confined to the actual members of the Christian community; but are in such a degree extended to all nations in every age of the world, as that sincerity shall be every where accepted in the stead of perfection, and no individual shall fail of final happiness, but in consequence of wilful, personal, and unrepented transgression.

I WOULD not be understood to assert, that the exact measure, in which the advantages

vantages of the Christian covenant will be dispensed to those, who are unacquainted with its laws, is any-where distinctly revealed : if only the general communication of them can be clearly evinced, we shall have little dispute about its extent and effects.

In the following observations it is intended to point out,

I. The proofs of the proposition, that the redemption of mankind is universal.

II. The doctrinal inferences, which may be drawn from its truth.

I. The universality of man's redemption is supported by proofs, which are to me neither weak nor obscure: if they should appear less convincing to any one else, let him consider them as drawn from writings,

writings, which were composed for the use of Christians, and in which, therefore, the natural object of the several authors is to represent the peculiar benefits enjoyed by believers; and if they mention the situation of other men, it is generally with no other view, than to shew its difficulties and its dangers.

THE effects attributed to the death of Christ, within whatever limits we may chuse to confine them, are certainly described by his Apostles in very large and comprehensive terms. Thus he is said to *have given himself a ransom for all* *; to *have tasted death for every man* †; to *be the true light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world* ‡; *the lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world* §; and *the lamb, which was slain from the foundation of the world* ||. The two last passages

* 1 Tim. xi. 6.

† Heb. xi. 9.

‡ John i. 9.

§ Ib. 29.

|| Rev. xiii. 8.

passages give light to each other ; one of them pointing out the peculiar end of the death of Christ ; and the other intimating at least more strongly the extensiveness of its effects.

To these general expressions, and more of the same kind might have been easily collected, may be added other passages, which convey the same sentiment in more precise and definite language. Thus St. John having asserted of Christ, that *he is the propitiation for our sins*, adds these remarkable words, *and not for our's only, but also for the sins of the whole world* *. So St. Paul also makes one purpose of the death of Christ to be *the redemption of the transgressions, that were under the first covenant* † ; and in another place, comparing together the redemption and the fall, he points out a remarkable similarity both in their causes and consequences ; that as one

* 1 John ii. 2.

† Heb. ix. 15.

of these events was occasioned by the offence, so was the other accomplished by the righteousness of one man; and that as from the consequences of the one no man is exempted, so from the effects of the other is no man excluded. *For if by one man's offence death reigned by one, much more they, which receive abundance of grace, and of the gift of righteousness, shall reign in life by one Jesus Christ. Therefore, as by the offence of one, judgement came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one, the free-gift came upon all men unto justification of life* *. The doctrine, for which we are contending, is here, you will observe, very fully and strongly expressed. It is not indeed represented as being discoverable by human reason, for the whole scheme of redemption is pure matter of revelation; but on the supposition of such a dispensation taking place, the universality of it is here asserted

* Rom. v. 17, 18.

serted to be highly reasonable. And certainly, that the remedy provided by divine goodness would be thus proportioned to the evil it was meant to repair, is perfectly consistent with the hopes and apprehensions, we should most readily entertain, of its nature and extent, with the exalted ideas we are taught to conceive of the Redeemer himself, and with the best notions, we are able to form, concerning the attributes and government of God.

THERE is another passage of the same Apostle, which is totally inexplicable but on the supposition, that the sacrifice of Christ had a retrospective efficacy, extending through every age of the world to the very origin of sin, and the creation of man, upon the earth. It was one considerable defect of the offerings under the Law, that their expiatory virtue was limited with respect to time, and therefore

fore was to be renewed by the repetition of the same sacrifices, *the High-priest entering into the holy place every year with blood of others* *. From this imperfection the sacrifice of Christ was entirely exempt: *it was not necessary that he should offer himself often; for then, as the Apostle argues, must he often have suffered since the foundation of the world* *. The effect, therefore, of Christ's one sacrifice once offered was understood by the Apostle to be precisely the same, as if it had been actually repeated at different intervals from the very creation; and that effect would certainly have been the expiation of sins committed from the time of the creation.

PERHAPS the train of the Apostle's reasoning, and the conclusion I wish to derive from it, may be more clearly represented thus; *Once in the end of the world hath Christ appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice*

* Heb. ix. 25, 26.

sacrifice of himself; nor was it necessary, for the accomplishment of this purpose, that he should offer himself often; for then must he often have suffered since the foundation of the world.* Among the sins, therefore, which he appeared to put away, must be included those antecedent to his appearance. Otherwise the argument of the Apostle is without force or foundation: for if the death of Christ had really no connection with the ages preceding it, whatever reasons might be urged for his often suffering to the end of the world, none could be pretended for his suffering often, or even at all, from the beginning.

To the proofs already given, may be added the following declarations of our Saviour; *I say unto you, that many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven. But the children of*

* Heb. ix. 25, 26.

*the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness**. Where, if by the children of the kingdom be meant unworthy believers; by the many, who are opposed to them, must be understood those virtuous men, who possessed not the advantages of revelation. Again, in the representation of the final judgement, *all nations are gathered before the Son of Man, and are separated one from another* †, not according to the religious privileges they had enjoyed, but according to the obedience, which they had paid to the divine will. And in the parable of the labourers, who were at different hours hired into the vineyard ‡, we are taught, that from the morning to the eleventh hour, from the creation of the world to its dissolution, it is the same Lord who calleth, and of those, *who are standing in the market place, who are willing to work the works of God, all are called, and all receive*

* Matth. viii. 12.

† Matth. xxv. 32.

‡ Matth. xx, 1. &c.

ceive the reward of their labours. We see then, that our Saviour, though he does not in any of these passages explain the particular means, by which the divine mercy is communicated to fallen man, does yet in them all clearly describe it, as extending universally to all good men in all ages of the world; in exact conformity to the idea of redemption, which was afterwards more fully unfolded by his Apostles.

From the evidence then, which has been produced, we may venture to conclude, that the redemption of mankind is universal; that the Christian dispensation is directed to the general good of the whole world; *that God is no respecter of persons, but in every age, and every nation, he that, according to his knowledge and opportunities, feareth God, and worketh righteousness, will, through the atonement*

M

of

of Christ, be undoubtedly *accepted with him* *.

II. It remains, that we consider the doctrinal uses, to which this notion of our redemption may be applied.

I. In the first place then, if our conclusion be just, it follows, that the tenet of absolute election is contradicted, not only by the voice of reason, but by the testimony of revelation also : for if all men are blessed with the means of happiness, then is no man preordained to misery. To lessen the force of the argument, it has been observed, that general expressions are used in scripture in a very limited sense, and the words " all men," and others of the same apparent extent, often denote only all the elect, or the society of sincere believers. Now supposing this to be sometimes the case, and it is not pretended

* Acts x. 34, 35.

tended to hold universally, the meaning of such words, whenever they occur, must be determined by the connection, in which they are placed. The expression of St. John particularly seems to be clear and decisive. *He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for our's only, but also for the sins of the whole world.* The natural and necessary force of these words, represents the design at least of redemption as extending to every human creature. The same enlarged apprehensions of the divine goodness must have been present also to the minds of the other Apostles, who have not feared to assert, that *God will have all men to be saved**; and that *he is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance* †. Nay, that even the wicked themselves, those who come not to repentance, are yet not previously excluded from the intention of Christ's merciful interpo-

* 1 Tim. ii. 4.

† 2 Pet. iii. 9.

terposition, is manifestly supposed by St. Peter, who, in speaking of false teachers, makes it the great aggravation of their guilt, that they *deny the Lord, who bought them* *.

THAT the Christian Scheme of redemption is thus inclusive of every human being, without any arbitrary and antecedent exceptions, may be further confirmed by a passage, which we have already taken occasion to cite from St. Paul. *As by the offence of one, judgement came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one, the free-gift came upon all men to justification of life.* Here the nature of the sentence requires such an opposition in each clause, that the corresponding words, "all men," must be used with the same latitude in both, that is, for the whole race of mankind.

It

* 2 Pet. ii. 1.

It will be objected, that the laws of criticism are superseded by the laws of truth: now that all men are actually justified is not true, and therefore cannot be asserted by the Apostle. Neither is it. What he affirms is briefly this; that the righteousness of Christ, and the offence of Adam, do both of them in their consequences respect the whole species. The Judgement indeed, which came upon all men, could not by human means be avoided. The Free-gift, on the contrary, though it likewise came upon all men, might, it is true, be refused. But this circumstance, greatly as it may lessen the effect, can in no degree alter the design of the dispensation itself. And consequently, though we allow it in its very fullest extent, we do not weaken our argument; which relates only to the design of the Christian Scheme, and not at all to its success. We may still therefore fairly conclude ourselves authorised

by the words of St. Paul to believe, that as all mankind, being partakers of the corrupt nature of Adam, have sinned, and merited condemnation; so all mankind, being partakers of the redemption wrought by Jesus Christ, are enabled *to work out their own salvation.*

THE two propositions, as they relate to the situations of men, are undoubtedly and universally true: but the event, resulting from those situations, is dependent on the behaviour of free agents, and may therefore in different cases be extremely different. That all men are not actually condemned, is owing to the free mercy of God: that all men are not actually saved, is owing to their own voluntary misconduct.

OF the passages alledged in confirmation of my original position, having thus largely

largely vindicated one, and that a very important one, I forbear to lengthen out an enquiry, which would be at once tedious, and perhaps superfluous; and shall close this part of the subject with a state of the difference between the opinion, which has been delivered, and that, which has been opposed. To us the redemption of mankind is universal in the full and proper sense of the word, as every individual is thereby furnished with the means of attaining salvation. The persons, we oppose, confine redemption to the elect alone, and acknowledge it universal only in a narrower sense, as no entire nation, or class of men, is excluded from its benefits, but the ancient and the modern, the patriarch and the philosopher, the Jew and the Christian, may be equally elect of God, and equally saved by Christ; thus attributing that narrowness to the design of Christianity, which we discover

M 4.

only

only in the event; and ascribing to the divine decree, what we with more modesty, if not more reason, impute to human wickedness.

2. THERE is also a second important consequence of the point, I have endeavoured to establish. It is impossible to be persuaded of the universality of man's redemption, in any the most limited sense, but we must at the same time perceive it to be an event, of which the Socinian system can give no account. The ends, which Christ accomplished by his death, are there represented to be no more than these: As a sufferer, he exhibited an illustrious example of enduring patience; as a martyr, he bore the most unquestionable testimony to the truth of what he had taught. By these precepts, and this example, men are led to repentance and amendment of life; by the pursuit of virtue

tue

true they are gradually freed from the power and dominion of sin; and by penitence they are, through the mercy of God, as intimated by nature, and revealed by Christ, intitled finally to forgiveness and acceptance.

Thus at length is made out a feeble and remote connection between the death of Christ and the salvation of man: a connection, which manifestly supposes the effects of the sufferings of Christ, like those of any other teacher of righteousness, to act and to terminate solely on man; so that no persons can be in any degree benefited by his death, but as they are improved and reformed by his religion. Now his religion can certainly have no influence on those who are unacquainted with its laws: and consequently the advantages of his coming, being on this hypothesis the mere effects of his instruction and example,

ple, must like them be confined to the actual members of his church. It is evident therefore, that the universality of man's redemption does necessarily imply a peculiar efficacy, of a nature perfectly distinct from the force of example and instruction; and is therefore a doctrine totally inconsistent with the scheme of Socinus. It scarcely needs to be observed, that even the retrospective influence of the sacrifice of Christ, which we have seen so clearly asserted by the Apostle to the Hebrews, is attended with equal difficulty on the principles of that imperfect System.

How far this argument is really conclusive, must be left to the consideration and judgement of others. It has been laid before you however with the greater willingness, because it is in itself simple and clear, and stands single and independent on every other. If it be convincing, the
great

great doctrine of atonement by the death of Christ is established on plain and solid ground; and if it be not, the other proofs of that article of our belief are not weakened by its failure.

THE redemption wrought by Jesus Christ is not then a partial privilege, but a general and universal blessing; which opens the gates of mercy to every nation under heaven, levels the vain distinctions of earthly excellence, checks the pride of science, silences the presumption of religion, and unites the various tribes of man, in one fold, under one shepherd Jesus Christ.

AND can any scheme of religion be more agreeable to a liberal heart, or more satisfactory to an inquisitive and enlightened mind? does any place the government of God in a more just and amiable point

point of view, or throw an equal lustre and importance on the character and conduct of our great Redeemer?

It is a doctrine also, which contains no peculiar difficulties, which does not absurdly contradict and disparage, or artfully flatter and extol, the powers of human reason.

It shews, that the great ruler of the universe does not unaccountably distribute the rewards and punishments of eternity by an antecedent and arbitrary decree, *which altereth not*; but, as the gracious father and preserver of all, ministers the means of happiness abundantly to all his creatures.

AND while it secures the honour of our Creator, it degrades not the person, and it detracts not from the merit of our Redeemer.

deemer. The effects of his example and doctrine on the manners of these later ages we freely and fully acknowledge: but at the same time we do not ungratefully disown the more 'mysterious and extensive efficacy of his death and sacrifice; which reaches all men, and pervades all time with undiminished influence, which disarms the justice and resentment of God, and which nothing can resist and defeat, but the impenitence and the infidelity of man.



(101)

2 TIM. iii. 15.

AND THAT FROM A CHILD THOU HAST
KNOWN THE HOLY SCRIPTURES, WHICH
ARE ABLE TO MAKE THEE WISE UNTO
SALVATION.

THE common blessings, which we
every day experience, are usually
received without emotion, and enjoyed
without thankfulness. Health and cheer-
fulness are of all things perhaps most con-
ducive to the happiness of human life;
and yet are received with a tranquil indif-
ference, which is seldom raised into glad-
ness,

ness, or heightened with the sense of gratitude. It is true, that the inestimable value of these advantages may be obtruded on our thoughts, by any of the numberless disorders, which attack the body, or the afflicting losses, which prey upon the mind. But there are blessings of so constant a nature, that we are destitute even of these painful means of discovering their importance. The opportunities and helps to knowledge are now become so numerous, that we have ceased to consider them as blessings. We seldom reflect on the situation of men in darker ages : nor if we did, could we readily conceive the difficulties, which they encountered in the pursuit of learning. Consider what a total alteration it would produce in the minds and manners of mankind, if every one were reduced to that slender fund of knowledge, which could be procured without foreign assistance; what a variety of means must

must be tried to accomplish the most simple ends; how many patient efforts would be requisite to lead to the most trifling discoveries. There is not a wider contrast, than that between the rude understandings of an untutored tribe, and the polished minds of a civilised people: the former unused to reason, and unimproved by culture, soon arrive at that little excellence, which they never exceed; the latter gradually formed and disciplined by education, and enriched with the stores and acquisitions of others, find few difficulties, which they cannot with diligence surmount: the exertions of one are weak and irregular, those of the other are strengthened by habit, and guided by the accumulated wisdom and experience of ages: the former unassisted and unenterprising, are scarcely acquainted with their native shore; while the latter with the spirit of adventurers explore the boundless

ocean, and add new worlds to the dominions of science.

SUCH are the advantages, which every individual of a civilised nation does, or may, in some degree or other possess. But are not these, like the other blessings of a gracious providence, too often neglected or perverted? There is a sort of idle study, which neither enlightens the understanding, nor improves the heart. It were well if the mischief stopped here; if the learning of some men were merely useless; if the fruit of the tree of knowledge were not still destructive to our innocence, and did not too often open our eyes, only to the discovery of our own nakedness. The ends, we ought to aim at, are information and instruction; if we attend to neither of these views, we may indeed sometimes meet with innocent amusement, but we shall more frequently be led to criminal gratifi-

gratification; we may for a time enjoy the pleasures of the imagination, but, without great care, we shall, sooner or later, find serious cause to lament the corruption of the heart.

INSTEAD of pursuing these general observations, it will be necessary from the extensiveness of the subject to confine ourselves within certain limits; and it may be most useful, and certainly will be most suitable to this time and place, to direct our attention to the peculiar advantages of studying the sacred scriptures.

THEY will be found, on the slightest enquiry, to afford abundant matter of gratification to the elegant and inquisitive mind; to contain the most extensive information in history and manners, the purest instructions in morals, and the only rational and satisfactory rules for the

direction of our religious belief and conduct.

It may seem a degradation of the sacred writings to recommend them as amusing: but it will not be denied, that this species of merit is eminently visible in the historical and poetical parts of them. The poetry of the inspired penmen is perfect in its kind, and filled with that sublime imagery, those glowing expressions, and bold sentiments, which are so much admired and felt in the productions of the eastern writers. Their histories are no less worthy our regard; we no where meet with more great events, more frequent and surprising revolutions: the people they describe, were distinguished from all other nations by their laws, religion, and manners: and if the incidents of private life, so frequently interspersed, perhaps blemish the dignity of the historian, they

they contribute however to the liveliness and variety of his narrative, and are in themselves so highly interesting to every human breast, that we return to them with an attention which is never weary, and a pleasure which is always new.

BUT though these writers do sometimes condescend to delight the fancy, their principal object is always to inform and improve the mind. Their histories might be considered separately in each of these views; but it will detain us less from more important matter, if we mingle the discussion of their historical excellence, with a few reflections on their moral tendency.

WITHOUT detracting from the merit or utility of other historians, it may be safely affirmed, that the most extensive information and instruction are conveyed by the sacred writers. The events, they re-

late, fill up a longer space of time, and are more interesting in themselves and their consequences. They begin with the creation of the world, and continue their narrative unbroken, through more than two thousand years prior to the earliest commencement of profane history. In their narratives alone scarcely a single fact can be produced, which is not, in some way or other, important to the whole race of mankind. The first incident, they relate, is the fall and degeneracy of man; one of the last is his recovery and redemption; the intermediate events are most of them calculated to prepare for the introduction of the covenant of mercy; and those, which succeed, are all uniformly directed to secure its reception and establishment.

As these writings form the most extensive and connected history of man; so they

they present us with the most varied and lively picture of human manners. The simplicity of the state of nature is faithfully delineated, with all the gradual refinements, which society and mutual intercourse imperceptibly produce. The mind is not only entertained with the splendour of royalty, and the fate of nations, but encouraged by the success of private virtue, and warned by the effects of domestic vice.

IN these circumstances the sacred writers excel others; there are advantages peculiar to themselves. In common details the causes of things seldom appear: great art and industry may be displayed by the historian in linking events to each other; but where the chain breaks, his account of things is confined to the narrow operations of human strength and wisdom: where this expedient fails, as it perpetually must,

his last wretched resource is in the imaginary influence of the words, for they are in reality nothing more than words, chance, accident, or fate. In the inspired pages, on the contrary, a cause is assigned, which is fully adequate to the production of the most marvellous events. In them is the *arm of the Lord revealed, who maketh poor, and maketh rich; who bringeth down and lifteth up; who changeth the times and the seasons; who ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will.*

ANOTHER circumstance, which renders the writings of these historians peculiarly instructive, is the form of government, which obtained among the people they describe. The ordinary dispensations of providence are apparently attended with so few alterations, of what we call the course of nature, that the quality of an action

action can seldom be inferred from the event. Our conduct may be laudable, and unsuccessful: and with regard to external advantages, prudence is often as safe a guide as religion. But in the order of events which took place in the Jewish and patriarchal times, the justice of God was more awefully displayed, and the moral nature of his government more distinctly revealed. Whatever afflictions were for a time permitted, for the trial of their faith and improvement of their morals; virtue was at least finally rewarded, and vice in the end overtaken by punishment. Thus every page of history, becomes an instructive lesson of morality: and it is not doubted, that an ordinary reader, with a moderate degree of caution, might obtain a more compleat rule for the conduct of life from these writings, than could be collected either from the subtle disquisitions

tions of ancient philosophy, or the affected refinements of modern sentimentalism.

BESIDE the general tendency to promote the interests of virtue, which is plainly discoverable in every part of the sacred writings: the only end and aim of some of these authors is evidently the improvement of their fellow-citizens in manners and morals. Their works are filled with such a number of excellent moral and prudential maxims, delivered with such holy earnestness, and expressed with so much elegant and unaffected simplicity, that if we did not revere them, as some of the brightest effusions of divine illumination, we should certainly admire them, as the noblest efforts of human wisdom. The Laws of Moses, if they be not the most compleat, are undoubtedly the earliest System of morality offered to the world: their imperfections are owing more to the
genius

genius of the people, than to that of the Legislator. The *hardness of their hearts* would not have received the delicate impressions of refined morality: nor were the ruder societies of those distant ages to be fettered with that multiplicity of rules and restraints, which obtain in the complex machines of modern governments.

It was the liberal spirit of Christianity, which improved and perfected the morality of Moses, abolished the long reign of partiality and prejudice, and taught men to exercise universal benevolence, and aspire to consummate virtue; to think no duty so far above their attainment as to forbid their attempt, no offence so injurious to their persons or characters, as to exclude the offender himself from their forgiveness and love.

But when taken in a religious view, the superior excellence and importance of the

the scriptures is undoubted. The religion of the heathen world consisted in a few rude, undigested notions, derived from uncertain tradition, and easily bent to the interest of the prince, or the caprice of the people. It was impossible that unassisted reason should discover those truths, which are most necessary to the support of the human mind. Man knew that he had sinned, and had forfeited the favour of God, and the rewards of virtue: he knew that repentance is not innocence, and that future obedience can no more atone for past transgression, than forbearing to incur new debts discharges those already contracted: he was conscious too, that his most punctual obedience partook of his infirmities, and his brightest virtues were shaded with imperfections and frailties. Still however the situation of the penitent, he with reason thought, could not but be more favourable, than that of others;

others; but how, or to what degree, nature could not teach him. The hopes inspired by the mercy of God were checked by his justice; and how to reconcile these jarring attributes, and make them co-operate in the pardon of guilt, were difficulties, which unaided reason could not surmount. Thus on the point of greatest consequence to our future happiness and present peace, the light of reason was but darkness, and the hopes of man scarcely removed from despair.

THE Jews had clearer lights; but their knowledge on this point was more frequently derived from cautious inference than express assertion; and their expectations were rather raised, than gratified. The promises of the Messiah were imperfectly understood, and the purposes of his mission indistinctly explained. Their religion was more profuse of temporal advantages,

vantages, than future blessings; and being covered with a thick veil, which nothing but the fulness of time could remove, it awakened attention, rather than informed the mind, and like a dim twilight insufficient to direct the steps of the wandering pilgrim, was chiefly valuable for the hopes it raised of the near approach of perfect day.

THE day so long anxiously expected at length arrived, when the *Sun of righteousness* arose with healing in his wings *, to give light to those who sat in darkness, and in the shadow of death, and to guide our feet in the way of peace †. The brightness of the Gospel dispelled the clouds of ignorance, prejudice and passion; the pride of reason was humbled, and her doubts removed; the justice of God was disarmed; and the hopes of man placed on the firmest basis. We are there plainly taught, what human reason unwillingly admitted, that

* Mal. iv. 2.

† Luke i. 79.

that man is fallen from innocence, and obnoxious to the divine displeasure; that the purest virtues are insufficient to wash away the guilt, we have all of us contracted, and the sincerest repentance to avert the punishment we have incurred. But we are also for our consolation informed, that the remedy for these evils, which human wisdom had not discovered, nor human merit deserved, had been provided by the divine mercy, and accepted by the divine justice; that a person, made known to us under the character of the Son of God, had condescended to dwell on earth, where he practised the severest virtues for our example, and endured the most cruel and disgraceful sufferings for our redemption; that, in consequence of this atonement, the divine goodness will accept the sincerity of the penitent, will pardon his offences, and reward his imperfect virtues.

INSTEAD

INSTEAD of vainly cavilling at the mysteries of the divine dispensations, and the established means of grace, let us remember, that human reason was unable to point out any method for our recovery; and instead of proudly dictating to omniscience, accept, with humble gratitude, the mercy, which he has freely offered, on the terms, which he has graciously appointed.

LASTLY, we are not only instructed in the means, which the divine wisdom has employed to effect our happiness, but, what is to us of still more importance, the conduct to be pursued by ourselves. And to encourage us to aspire to the rewards of virtue with full confidence of success, the God and Father of all hath promised to strengthen and support the infirmities of our nature; that if we be not wanting to ourselves, if we faithfully endeavour

to perform his commands, and humbly solicit the assistance of his grace, he will never leave us, nor forsake us; he awakens the terrors of conscience, to turn us from evil, and he will add the comfort of his spirit, to lead us to that which is good, to quicken our languid desires, confirm our wavering faith, and improve our defective virtue.

BUT in vain do we hope for further blessings, if we neglect or abuse those already conferred: if we despise the suggestions of conscience, we can have no ground to expect the further admonitions of the spirit; if we shut our eyes to the light of nature, they will not be opened by the illumination of grace. Divine wisdom is acquired by the same attention with earthly learning. Neglect therefore no means of improvement, for none are without their use; but chiefly *search the scriptures*, for

in them are *the words of eternal life*. The pursuit of religious knowledge is the universal duty of mankind. As members of society indeed, some men are more peculiarly directed to this study by the nature of their profession; and some from their leisure, their talents, and their previous attainments, are enabled to pursue it with greater success and more extensive usefulness; but as creatures accountable for our actions, we all are equally interested and equally obliged, to inquire, with diligence and sincerity at least, what is the will of our Creator, and what the law of our conduct. In all matters of consequence to us voluntary ignorance is naturally productive of disappointment and disgrace; and can we conceive it to be without danger or dishonour in the point which is of greatest moment to us, in the *one thing which is really needful*? They who will not know their duty, are as truly culpable

culpable as they who will not practise it : and they, who neglect any of the means of knowledge, are justly chargeable with all the consequences of that neglect. Such indeed, as labour under invincible ignorance, are objects not of blame but compassion. Yet, when we consider the opportunities, of which in this enlightened age every one does, or may in some degree partake, we shall be led to conclude, that ignorance is very seldom without guilt; and that all of us may be, if not vainly learned in the proud systems of science, yet sufficiently skilled in the plain principles of Christianity, which are at the same time level to the understanding, and important to the happiness of all men.



1 P E T. ii. 15.

FOR SO IS THE WILL OF GOD, THAT WITH
WELL-DOING YE MAY PUT TO SILENCE
THE IGNORANCE OF FOOLISH MEN.

OF all the arguments, which have been directed against the truth and excellence of Christianity, none have been urged with greater frequency, or displayed with greater triumph, than that which is founded on the misconduct of its professors. It is an argument indeed, which, whether apparently confirmed by particular facts, or supported only by falsehood and misrepresentation, can do no credit to the understanding or the heart of its author. No rule of conduct has ever prevented all the crimes, which it forbid; and some have had the peculiar misfortune

to be made the pretext for the very evils, which they were originally designed to remedy. To argue therefore against religion from the abuses of it, proceeds from a defect in judgement: to argue against it designedly on wrong principles, or from pretended or distorted facts, proceeds from a defect of another nature, and is not a weakness but a crime.

YET feeble as it certainly is, this sort of reasoning has been confidently used in every age by the rival sects of Christians against each other, and by Infidels against them all.

BUT the weakness of this reasoning, however visible in itself, and however disgraceful to the cause in which it is employed, is far from affording any excuse to those, who give occasion to it by their unworthy behaviour. The duty of example

ample is every way so important, the discharge of it is attended with so many advantages, and the neglect of it productive of such extensive mischief, that we cannot wonder at the frequent earnestness, with which it is inculcated in the books of sacred scripture. Thus the prophet, in the very moment of declaring to his royal penitent the pardon of his guilt, urges the necessity of some penal interposition to prevent the evil of his example. *The Lord also hath put away thy sin, thou shalt not die. Howbeit because by this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme, the child, that is born unto thee, shall surely die* *. Thus our Saviour also, though never an encourager of formal and ostentatious piety, disdains not to invite imitation to the aid of reason, and represents the bright influence of an attractive example as the best illustration of the proofs and precepts of religion.

O 4

Let

* 2 Sam. xii. 14.

Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven *. And his Apostle declares it to be *the will of God, that with well-doing we put to silence the ignorance of foolish men* †.

THIS passage indeed in the connection, in which it stands, is properly a political injunction, which must be accommodated to the peculiar spirit and temper of each changing form of human government: but it may be considered also as a religious precept, which claims an equal influence on the conduct of man, in every age, and under every variety of external circumstances. For as the very existence of religion, in its infant state, depended on the civil conduct of believers; so has its success at all times been constantly and deeply affected by their moral conduct.

THE

* Matth. v. 16.

† 1 Pet. ii. 15.

THE different ways, in which the vices of Christians are detrimental to their religion, may be considered under three heads; as they afford an argument to Infidelity, an excuse to Irreligion, or a temptation to Immorality.

I. THE vices of believers afford an argument to Infidelity.

IN the earlier ages of the Gospel, the manners of men were directed by the rules of their profession; and their profession in return was recommended and supported by their blameless and exemplary conduct. For it was, not merely in defence of their religion, as an innocent or even useful institution, but in positive proof of its heavenly origin, that the primitive Christians appealed to the effects, which attended its steps, and the train of virtues, which constantly adorned its progress. They could

urge,

urge, that it inspired its converts with a firmness and resolution, superior to the views of interest, the allurements of pleasure, and even the charms of life; and that the evidence of this was not founded on the conduct of a few individuals only, which might be imputed to natural temper, or to some peculiar strength of mind, but on the general behaviour of all universally, of the many, who were taken from the meanest and most abandoned among the multitude, as well as of the few, who had learned the lessons of philosophy, or had practised the decencies of polished society.

THE degeneracy of succeeding times may have weakened the conclusion in favour of religion; but no possible degeneracy can ever give real force to the same argument, when directed against the truth of Christianity. Because nothing can prove the

the natural tendency of that institution to be evil, which, it must be confessed, inculcates every virtue, and has actually been productive of good, during so long a period, and in so eminent a degree.

If the objection seem to require a more particular answer, we may further observe, that the vices of believers are not the consequences of religion, but of its abuse or neglect; that the corruption of Christian manners in this or any other age, cannot be at all compared with the enormous wickedness of the heathen nations in similar stages of society; that those excesses, which seem more peculiarly the offspring of Christianity, were the real production of ignorance and superstition; and that, even were this less evident, the causes, which influence human manners, are so many, and affect them so differently under different circumstances, that the true tendency

dency of an extensive system of religion, can seldom be gathered from its apparent effects in one age, or the partial experience of a single nation.

If the argument from the first ages of Christianity itself be thought an exception to this observation; it must be remembered, that an equal number of striking circumstances can very rarely, and may possibly never again concur to establish either the same or the opposite conclusion. The improvement in human manners, which then took place, was coincident with the rise, grew with the growth, and declined with the corruption of Christianity. It was an event, which cannot be ascribed to the intervention, or even the co-operation of any other known cause. It was likewise so great, continued for so long a time, and spread so widely in so many different and distant nations, as to afford

afford the strongest proof, that the influence of the new religion on the lives of its professors was not accidental or apparent only, but the effect of a real and very powerful tendency in favour of virtue. It can hardly be necessary to remark, that nothing equal to this, or in any degree resembling it, either has or can be adduced to fix on Christianity the contrary character.

To every fair inquirer these observations may be perfectly satisfactory. Yet after all, the argument against religion from the vices of its professors, how solidly soever refuted, will still preserve its influence, and will always produce much greater effects than its real and intrinsic value will fairly account for. When men wish not to believe, the slightest suspicion is real and substantial evidence, the weak-
est

est objection is decisive, and the smallest difficulty is insurmountable.

THE arguments of infidelity often owe their success to the influence of prepossessions, which it is much more easy to confirm than to remove. But though few men can hope by the cogency of their reasoning to add stability to their religion; yet every one may be careful at least, that its enemies derive no fresh advantages, whether of strength or opportunity, from his own voluntary misconduct. And this will still be our duty, how inconclusive soever the inference may be, which it is intended to obviate: for it is prescribed with this very view, to silence, not the voice of right reason, but *the ignorance of foolish men.*

THE weakness, and even the wickedness of other men may change the nature of
of

of our obligations, or increase their force. Thus the scruples of weak minds require from us in the most indifferent matters a degree of circumspection and restraint, which were otherwise unnecessary. And if the cavils also of unfair minds are made an additional inducement to dissuade us from such conduct, as will at once prove hurtful to ourselves, and appear disgraceful to our religion; we have certainly no reason of complaint, as we are enjoined the performance of nothing, to which we were not before obliged. We should rather surely consider it as a gracious condescension of divine goodness, which in aid of the private motives of duty and interest, applies to our more generous feelings, derives our obedience to the Laws of Heaven, from our regard to each other, and without adding to the number of our obligations, intrusts us with the exalted charge

charge of promoting the glory of God, and the prosperity of religion.

II. UNBELIEVERS are not the only persons, whom our misconduct may fatally mislead. Even in professed Christians there is a cold or contemptuous neglect of public worship, and of revealed doctrines, which is often defended on the same pretence: that it does not appear, that they have either of them any actual influence on the conduct of those, who regard them most scrupulously. This representation is surely very remote from truth; but it is impossible to convince men by reason, who argue only from what they see, and who will see only what they please.

BELIEF in the doctrines of religion, and attendance on its solemnities, have plainly a natural tendency to awaken our sense of those duties, which the Being, whom

whom we adore, has commanded, and to quicken our pursuit of those virtues, which it is the chief and avowed end of revelation to recommend and promote. And though it must be acknowledged, that these means, however wisely adopted, partake in the imperfection of every thing relating to man, and often fail of the ends, they were designed to accomplish; yet is it far from being certain, or even probable, that they do fail, either so frequently, or so considerably, as the objection supposes. Appearances of religion undoubtedly may be consistent with many vices. Enthusiasm and superstition have often ventured to palliate and cover the greatest crimes, and sometimes have even dared to enjoin them: but the Religion, which is approved by reason, must be the friend of virtue: it is not employed to sadden the countenance, and heat the imagination, but to correct and purify the heart. Such

at least is the design of Christian devotion; and such have been its effects, wherever it has been suffered to possess its due influence. To assert the contrary were to contradict the general sense of mankind; as even the very existence of hypocrisy itself is a clear and convincing proof. The exertions of the hypocrite are directed to acquire the reputation and advantages of virtue without its restraints. For this purpose he assumes the appearance of Religion, and is unremittingly constant in the public exercises of devotion. Now the character of the hypocrite is certainly not weakness or absurdity; but yet, if the duties of religion be not, in opinion at least, intimately connected with virtue, either his conduct is without a motive, and his artifices without an object, or the means, he employs, have no tendency to produce the ends, to which they are directed.

RELIGIOUS

RELIGIOUS observances, it is true, cannot divest us of our natural frailty; but they certainly give us awful ideas of the moral Governor of the world, and have a peculiar tendency to form and encourage that serious and temperate disposition of mind, which will best secure us from great or frequent excesses. It may be doubted whether the history of man can furnish a single example, in which real and enlightened devotion has ever been united with habitual and acknowledged vice. At least on every seeming occurrence of this unnatural union, we shall be allowed to observe, that the outward form of religion may subsist with nothing or with little of its inward spirit; but that no degree of unaffected piety towards God can easily, or perhaps possibly, be reconciled with wilful and continued disobedience to his authority. In such instances therefore, however strong the appearance of religion

may be, we have good reason to suspect, that the reality is often wanting, but none to infer, that it can be ever useless.

BUT though the inefficacy of religious observances cannot be justly concluded from any particular failures ; yet it must be remembered, that these circumstances enable men to deceive themselves and persuade others ; that the cause of religion has suffered more severely from the loose and unsupported charge of hypocrisy in its friends, than from all the arts and all the arguments of its most inveterate enemies ; and especially that obedience to the divine commands, is required from us, not only as a private duty, but also as a public example, which may both *put to silence the ignorance of foolish men*, and afford to artless and inexperienced minds the benefits of imitation, unmixed with its usual and great disadvantages. For,

III. THE

III. THE vices of believers not only furnish a pretence to the infidelity of some, and the irreligion of others, but spread also a very dangerous snare in the plainer paths of moral virtue.

THE force of example on the minds and manners of mankind is universally seen and acknowledged. Interest, inclination, and duty, the laws of man, the laws of nature, and the laws of God, are in vain united to resist its progress: every principle of action is perverted at the caprice of custom, and every power of exertion is enfeebled and subdued by the magic influence of prevailing fashion. Happy would it be for the world, if the voice of the charmer, which so few can refuse to hear, were heard to pour its enchanting strains in the defence of virtue. And as it is no inconsiderable encouragement to goodness, that every instance of

right behaviour has a tendency to produce this desirable event ; so is it an aggravation of every crime, that it contributes to enlarge the dominion of sin, and to perpetuate the miseries of man.

It is certainly useful to consider the consequences of vice in every light, that may at all deter us from the commission of it. Now, as an example, it is attended with peculiar circumstances, to which an ingenuous mind can hardly be insensible. The future punishments of vice may be averted by the use of those means, which religion has graciously supplied ; its temporal inconveniences to ourselves may be lessened by prudence, or borne with resignation, so far the evil is of our own creation, and the remedy in our own power. Its temporal consequences also to others, as an injury, may be prevented by attention, or relieved by liberality. But
its

its effects, as an example, are equally fatal and unavoidable; they yield to no precautions, and admit of no reparation. No satisfaction can be made for the loss of innocence. No human art can heal the wounded spirit, or restore its purity to the polluted mind. Penitence indeed would at least alleviate the crimes, which it bewailed: but penitence is not readily excited; it is much more easy to allure than to deter, to seduce than to reform. Many too, who have suffered by our vices, may be no longer in a situation to receive improvement from our virtues: and the evils inflicted on one man cannot be in any degree compensated, nor perhaps equalled, by the benefits, we may occasion to others. Diseases are more active than remedies; and the contagion of one vicious example may soon produce effects, which the united influence of many characters of distinguished

guished excellence will neither balance nor repair.

As therefore the consequences of our conduct on the belief and manners of those around us are thus important in themselves ; as they cannot be prevented by any prudence, nor averted by the sincerest repentance ; they surely form a motive to goodness, which no thinking man can overlook, and no generous man will disregard. It is a motive, of which every one, who is not insensible to the dearest interests of human society, must see the reality, and feel the force ; and if even he would consider the wonderful variety of inducements, by which the divine goodness allures men to virtue and happiness, how inflexibly perverse must be that heart, which is unaffected by them all !

FOR A LIFE of virtue is represented, as the conduct prescribed by our reason, as becoming the dignity of our nature, and exalting it into some resemblance with the divine perfections: it is commanded by our Creator, as the great test of our obedience; it is required by our Redeemer, as the best token of our gratitude: it is recommended from its effects on our own lives, on our prosperity and comfort here, and on our everlasting happiness hereafter: it is recommended from its effects on the lives of other men, on their conduct and enjoyments: and lastly, it is recommended from its effects on the supreme Being himself, who deigns to represent his own happiness, as increased by our obedience, and his unapproachable glory, as receiving additional lustre from the brightness of human virtues.



THE
HISTORY OF THE
CITY OF LONDON
FROM THE
FIRST
SETTLING OF THE
TOWN
TO THE
PRESENT
TIME
BY
JOHN STOW
1618

I THESS. v. 22,

ABSTAIN FROM ALL APPEARANCE OF EVIL.

AS men are disposed to find fault with any thing rather than themselves, the clearest doctrines of divine revelation, and the purest precepts of an amiable religion, do not always escape without censure. The advice contained in the text may be thought unnecessary by some, and oppressive by others. If we obey the injunctions of the Gospel, say they, if we duly discharge the substantial duties of religion and morality, worship God, love our neighbour, and reverence ourselves, what need is there of any further care? appearances cannot change the
nature

nature of our actions, nor deceive that wise and good Being, whose unerring judgement can distinguish the most doubtful motives, and has pronounced those acts of goodness to be most pleasing, which are most carefully concealed.

OTHERS, who in some cases acknowledge the usefulness of the precept, may perhaps think it a cruel aggravation of a burden, which was before heavier than they were well able to bear. If we obey God and satisfy our own conscience, why must we be judged of man's judgement? If we follow the dictates of sound reason and real revelation, is it not enough, unless we pursue the numberless mazes and windings, with which human folly has perplexed the paths of religion? When we are commanded to abstain from evil, natural reason, aided by the word of God, fixes the precise meaning and extent of the

the injunction ; but when we are charged to abstain from the appearance of evil, we are lost in uncertainty, without any rule to distinguish, what is forbidden, and what permitted. If all appearance of evil be evil, then must we regulate the standard of virtue by the mistakes of ignorance, or the misconstructions of perverseness ; or because others are superstitious in religion, and unnecessarily austere in morals, we must be condemned for the want of both.

THESE objections however will disappear, if we duly consider the true nature and end of the duty recommended to our observance. It does not require us to contradict our own conscience in compliance with the sentiments of other men ; Virtue is too sacred an obligation to be sacrificed to appearances ; nor will the guilt of the smallest vice be atoned for by any advantages, which it may have been really designed

designed to produce. If this could have been doubtful to the professors of any religion, it certainly cannot to those of Christianity, whatever may be the case with other men, if they *do evil that good may come*, their condemnation is just. Those actions then, which evidently partake of the nature of virtue or vice, cannot be at all affected by the command of the text: whatever be the appearances or consequences, the one must be punctually performed, and the other religiously avoided. But there are actions of a more questionable shape, which some men esteem perfectly indifferent, while others, of more serious or more timid tempers, carefully separate and distinguish them, exalting these into the rank of duties, and sinking those into the catalogue of sins. Such are the performances, to which the Apostle particularly directs our attention, charging us to reverence the cautious scruples of
stricter

stricter Christians, and to respect even the fanciful distinctions of our weaker brethren. Nay, with whatever neglect or contempt the pride of superior abilities may sometimes prompt us to treat them; it was the latter description of men, who were the more immediate objects of the Apostle's concern: as they were more likely to be shocked by a departure from received principles, or dazzled and misled by the example of an admired character.

THIS is the principal and surely a sufficient cause, why those, who are not subject to such nice fears and scruples, are admonished to bear with the infirmities of well-disposed Christians, not to ridicule their fears or despise their ignorance, not to perplex their minds with doubtful disputations, to unsettle their belief by abstruse argument, or pervert their practice by artificial refinement. Far from pursuing

suing the dictates of vain-glory, to boast
 of our superiority in knowledge, and free-
 dom from superstitious and unnecessary
 restraints, we should be careful *to follow*
those things, wherewith one may edify
another: in matters of indifference con-
 descending to the tender minds of our
 feeble brethren, appearing to adopt their
 scruples, and rather following an example,
 which may expose us to the ridicule of
 weakness, than persevering in a conduct,
 which they cannot imitate without guilt.
 These are duties, which can scarcely be
 entirely disregarded, while the observance
 of them forms so important a part in the
 character of an illustrious Apostle. *Though*
I be free from all men, yet have I made my-
self servant unto all, that I might gain the
more. And unto the Jews I became as a
Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them
that are under the law, as under the law,
that I might gain them that are under the
law.

law. To them that are without law, as without law, being not without law to God but under the law to Christ, that I might gain them that are without law. To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. However unimportant it may have at first view appeared, we cannot easily overlook a duty which the Apostle was so careful to discharge, or slight a precept which our Saviour has himself guarded with the severest and most solemn sanctions. Woe unto the world because of offences: it must needs be that offences come, but woe unto that man, by whom the offence cometh†. And, whoso shall offend one of these little ones, which believe in me, it were better for him that a mill-stone were hanged about his neck and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea †.*

* 1 Cor. ix. 19—22.

† Matth. xviii. 6, 7.

THE reasons of the precept we are considering have in part already appeared. Christian charity is the most amiable, and extensive principle ever proposed for the direction of human conduct: it influences our inward thoughts, and controls our most indifferent actions: we are required not only to speak, but also to think no evil: our mutual intercourse must not only be harmless but beneficial; and our example not only innocent in itself, but inoffensive and instructive to others. Now if we indulge ourselves, without reserve, in pleasures or pursuits, which, though they may appear perfectly indifferent to us, are judged immoral by our neighbour; however unexceptionable our conduct may be in itself, yet when considered in the light of an example, it may be worthy of the severest reprehension. Opinions, thus thrown into practice, may stagger the resolution, but afford no ground to convince

vince the judgement: the dictates of conscience may be overpowered by the force of example, but as no authority, except that of reason, can reverse them, the action retains its full guilt: for *to him that esteemeth any thing to be unclean*, however pure it may be in its nature, or sanctified by custom, *to him it is unclean* *. Since then our negligence in these more trifling articles may be as fatal to the virtues of our less enlightened inferiors as the open indulgence of more criminal propensities; we ought to keep a strict guard over every part of our conduct, that nothing may inadvertently escape us, which weak and unstable Christians may *wrest to their own destruction*. And as we are commanded to exhibit an example to others, for their sakes, rather than our own; in adjusting the limits of our duty in this respect, we must regard, not so much the intrinsic value of the action itself, as the effect it

Q 2

is

* Rom. xiv. 14.

is likely to produce. The most innocent liberties, if they encourage others in irregularities, should be studiously avoided. A character, with no blemishes but of this inferior sort, is in one respect even more hurtful than those, which are uniformly vicious. For imitation will be more general and unguarded, when the force of the example is increased by the weight of numerous and great virtues; and the credit of the man not sullied by any of the darker and more detested crimes.

To these rules of practice and self-government may be added some cautions to be observed in our social intercourse and conversation.

Thus much at least all men have a right to expect from us, that we conduct ourselves towards them without acrimony or contempt; if we wish to convince them
of

of their errors, that we do it with calmness; if to remove their scruples and weaknesses, that we reason with them seriously and soberly. The heat of zeal, and the petulance of wit, are better calculated to inflame than to convince, to wound than to reform. The Gospel disdains them both; its venerable truths ask not the aid of ridicule, its mild persuasions will not be enforced with the severity of satire. The sober sanctity of religion is not less profaned by the levity of licentious wit, than the amiable meekness of morality by the fury of ungoverned passion.

THE duty, on which we are treating, has been hitherto considered with a view only to its effects on the conduct of other men; but we must not forget, that it may be recommended also from its influence on our own. For as an occasional abstinence even from lawful enjoyments is a necessary

guard and security to virtue; in like manner, *abstaining from the appearance of evil* may be requisite to prevent the commission of it. That quick sense of duty, which shrinks from the slightest touch, and is alarmed at the very smallest appearance of evil, whatever contempt it may meet with in the world, is undoubtedly the best preservative of innocence, and the brightest ornament of a truly enlightened mind. The most distant approaches to vice are not without hazard: we may plead, and certainly with reason, for the lawfulness of those actions, which we deliberately esteem to be in themselves indifferent; but then how naturally is the plea extended to those also, which we esteem to be such without due deliberation, or even to those, which are only esteemed such by others?

FURTHER, this virtuous deference to the scruples of well-disposed men is not
only

only suggested by the fear of danger, but encouraged also by the hope of improvement. In many of our moral performances, there may be some uncertainty with respect to the particular motive from which they are derived; but when we thus sacrifice our own sentiments to the opinions or the prejudices of others, when we desist from a conduct, which is attended with no present risk, either of interest, or reputation, in such a case there can hardly remain a doubt, that we are indeed actuated by the motives of futurity, and the great principle of duty to God. How much, in the present state of religion, this principle wants strengthening, we need not observe; and how much it may be strengthened and improved by continual exercise even in the minuter morals, we need not stop to compute: for whatever the degree of improvement may be, the importance of

the principle itself will alone suffice to render it of serious and essential moment.

THE command then given by the Apostle, which was thoughtlessly accused of unmeaning rigour, appears when duly considered, to be in many ways highly beneficial. Obedience in this article is one of the clearest evidences, we are able to give, that our conduct is really directed by the great and only steadfast principle of human virtue, it increases the influence of that principle on our minds, it displays our zeal for the cause of goodness in the most unambitious and inoffensive manner, it is itself an instance of diligent self-government, it forms a considerable part of, what may be called, moral prudence, and is not the least engaging expression of Christian charity.

THE

THE same spirit of forbearance and charity pervades every precept of religion, and is equally recommended to all ranks and distinctions of men. *As those, who are strong, ought thus to bear the infirmities of the weak;* so weak and timid tempers, who see difficulties in the easiest observances, and duties in the most indifferent performances, are in their turn forbidden to censure and condemn those, who are less delicately scrupulous. The grounds of opinions and the motives of actions cannot always be discovered without difficulty, nor can they be hastily or harshly censured consistently either with charity to others, or safety to ourselves. To examine the truth of doctrines is the privilege of a candid and enlightened mind: but to discern the intentions and inclinations of the heart, and assign to each motive its just and distinct weight, requires nothing less than infinite wisdom directed by

by infinite goodness. And little as it is in our power, it is still less in our province: *Who art thou, that judgest another man's servant? to his own master he standeth or falleth* *. Your little fretful censures, it is certain, will have no effect on his future destiny; and it is as certain, they can have no good one on your own.

AND as you must be cautious in judging of other men's conduct, so must you be careful in directing your own. Reason, however weak and unimproved, when aided by the word of God, and the suggestions of an honest conscience, will be your best and safest guide. No man's example should in any case be blindly and implicitly followed. Say not the thing is a trifle. To a moral agent, the difference between obedience and disobedience, vice and virtue, is always important. But a man of refined understanding is more likely

* Rom. xiv. 4.

likely to know the nature of human duty, and a man of acknowledged virtue to resist the allurements of sin. This is a Truth, which, however obvious in itself, cannot be admitted as a rule of conduct but with great circumspection and reserve. You are to be judged, not by another man's conscience, but your own. Now Conscience is an unpliant principle, which will not bend to the force of example, nor yield to the weight of authority. Your inclination may be increased, but your reason cannot be convinced. And a conduct, which you inwardly condemn, cannot be sanctified by the united concurrence of saints, confessors, and martyrs: it might be innocent, it might be laudable in them, but it must be criminal in you. Still however so general a practice, if it does not prove the lawfulness of an action, may lead us to doubt of its being forbidden. So far may be granted, but at the same

time

time it must never be forgotten, that to contradict a doubtful or a decided conscience are crimes of the same sort, though not of the same guilt. For if it be the highest disobedience to our heavenly master, to do what we know will certainly provoke him; it must argue a want of due reverence, to do what we fear may probably displease him. Were this matter less evident from reason, it is abundantly clear from revelation. The Apostolic decision is this; *Happy is he, who condemneth not himself in that thing, which he alloweth; and he that doubteth, if he act in opposition to that doubt, is condemned: for whatsoever is not of faith, is sin* *.

LET us then carefully avoid both extremes: let us not, from a weak imitation of a respected character, involve ourselves in guilt; nor from a weaker attachment to

* Rom. xiv. 22, 23.

to trivial gratifications, *destray those for whom Christ died.*

BUT if the purity of the Christian character cannot be reconciled with these lighter offences; how must it be sullied and defiled with the pollution of grosser vices? If it be criminal to act in contradiction to the suggestions of a doubting conscience, to copy indiscriminately all even of the innocent parts of an amiable character, or to furnish materials and opportunity to such injudicious imitation; how highly disgraceful must it be, to act in direct opposition to the positive declarations of a decided conscience, to emulate the worst parts of the worst characters, or to seduce the weak and unwary to the participation of crimes, which without such delusive arts, they would never have possessed either the courage or the folly to imitate?

IT

It were to be wished, that all men would at least thus far abstain from the appearance of evil; that if they cannot be persuaded to resign their innocent indulgences, they would however forbear to triumph in their criminal excesses: if they will not aspire to the excellences of religion, it may surely be expected, that they submit to the restraints of decency; and if they will not adorn and reform the world by an example of virtue, it may at least be required, that they corrupt not human society by an open neglect of the divine laws, nor insult it by a studied contempt of its own institutions.

Thus much may be reasonably requested of all men, and if only this were effectually obtained, it would be attended with most favourable consequences to the interests of virtue and religion. External decorum, though not virtue, is one of her
most

most useful allies ; it requires the same attention, and imposes similar restraints ; and he who pays this tribute to religion, cannot long be totally estranged from her service. But however inconsiderable its effects may be on the person himself, a general decency of conduct must greatly promote the gradual improvement of public morals. By rendering bad examples less glaring and conspicuous it lessens their effects ; and by forbidding the outward expressions of insult and contempt, it removes one of the principal discouragements to virtue ; and thus leaves religion to exert her full influence on the human mind, which in proportion as it is freed from undue bias, will recover its natural tendency to the love of virtue and the belief of religion.



but of no great value.

PROV. iv. 23.

KEEP THINE HEART WITH ALL DILIGENCE,
FOR OUT OF IT ARE THE ISSUES OF LIFE.

IT is the business and the pride of a being distinguished by the gift of reason to cultivate with care the intellectual powers of his mind, and to strengthen those superior faculties, which are at once the highest mark of his natural excellence, and the principal ingredient of his more refined enjoyments.

WERE the same being endowed also with a moral nature, the improvement of the heart would present to his exertions a still more important object, which if it were not imposed by the necessity of duty,

R should

should be embraced with the ardour of ambition. The interval between reason and instinct may not always be very conspicuous: but reason directed and dignified by virtue is indisputably the most exalted perfection of terrestrial natures, and the single source, from which they derive their real happiness. It is indeed the only principle of human conduct, which is attended with effects in any degree constant and valuable, not confined to trivial gratifications, or exhausted in vehement and interrupted gusts of pleasure, but such as will be uniformly felt and acknowledged in every stage of our existence, will strengthen the hand of industry, raise the dejection of misfortune, and brighten the triumphs of success.

MANY of our pursuits receive their colour and character from external causes: and the circumstances, in which they are undertaken,

undertaken, the manner, in which they are conducted, the event, with which they are followed, or even the accidental defect or excellence of some other attainment; with which they happen to be compared, may render them the objects of admiration or contempt, of applause or reproach. But the cultivation of our moral principle, being the performance of a duty, which has its end and foundation in our very nature, will always maintain its intrinsic worth; and every change of outward situation or circumstance will but serve to display some new or greater instance of its various and extensive efficacy. It is a pursuit too, in which sincerity is constantly followed by success; and in which, whatever ridicule may be artfully thrown on the singularity of our first attempts, Success will however ultimately vindicate our choice, and in reward of our persevering endeavours will secure to

us the most valuable of earthly blessings, the approbation of God, the favour of good men, and the respect of all men.

THE moral improvement of the heart then is not to be considered as a matter of education merely, but as our own best and most important concern; not as interesting the anxious bosom of a parent only, but as the very end of our being, and the great and only real business of our whole lives.

It will indeed demand our constant and undivided attention, whether we be pressing forward with eager steps to the higher and more noble attainments, or be indolently contented to preserve those advantages, which we may have already acquired. For the principles of virtue, though fixed in our minds with the utmost care, and settled on the firmest grounds,

grounds, are still liable to many dangers, to be rendered useless by sloth, to be corrupted and depraved by vice: if they do not direct, they will inevitably follow the general current of our actions; and how beautiful soever they may seem in theory, their vigour and permanence are wholly derived from the prudent and unbending firmness, with which they are applied in the daily events of common life.

WE see then how greatly the qualities of the heart are dependent on our external conduct: and so far as they are thus dependent, the danger, to which they are first exposed, and which therefore must demand our particular attention, arises from the careless commission of small faults, and the weak indulgence of vicious thoughts. Habits of this kind, harmless and insignificant as they may now appear, will hereafter exercise our utmost strength.

Trivial errors naturally swell and ripen into sins ; and they become from this very circumstance the more frequently and certainly fatal, because their growth is too gradual to awaken the sense of present danger, or evince the necessity of immediate resistance. Reason also, which blushes at our crimes, is often tempted to overlook, or even vindicate our follies ; not considering that the same dexterity, which covers a small offence, will extenuate a greater, and the virtuous reluctance, which is often opposed, will in time be subdued. The principles of goodness can in no instance be counteracted with impunity ; the least violence will disorder and interrupt their gentle influence ; and the slightest stain is sufficient to discolour the fountain of all human excellence.

THE moral habits of man will also lose much of their strength and gracefulness,
not

not only if he despise the seemingly minute effects of unimportant actions, but if he omit or mismanage the direction of his most secret thoughts. This is a point of serious moment, whether we consider the advantages of attention to it, or the hazard and guilt of neglect. *The thought of foolishness is sin* *. The mind is polluted by the ideas which it admits and indulges ; and with respect to the degree of the offence, the actual perpetration may possibly make less difference than we are sometimes apt to imagine : for if in the one case we are to add the mischief done to mankind ; in the other we may observe, that this mischief may have been prevented by no higher and no better motive than the selfish apprehension of worldly disgrace or punishment.

WERE this matter less evident, yet if we be sincere in the pursuit of duty, it is
obviously

* Prov. xxiv. 9.

obviously our wisdom to resist the adversaries of virtue on their first appearance, while their impressions are yet weak and transient, strengthened by no mean compliances, and supported by no favoured party within our own breasts.

By this conduct also we shall have the peculiar advantage, not only of repelling the enemies of our peace before they have obtained firm hold on our affections, but of beginning the conquest of the passions, while the temptations of the world are yet distant. In such circumstances the difficulties of our probation will be least oppressive to us; the victories of the closet are the prelude to more conspicuous successes; and when our thoughts are once reduced under strict discipline, it must be an object of more than usual magnitude, which can induce us to break through the strong

strong fence of established order and habitual restraint.

THIS instance of self-government is at the same time the firmest security against the approach of vice, and the best assistance to our progress in virtue: for the mind thus exercised is always on its guard against danger, and always in readiness to aim at new acquirements: its relaxations have the cheerfulness and tranquillity of innocence: its busier hours are dedicated to objects of real moment, to intellectual or moral improvement, to public or domestic cares, to present or future happiness, and are alternately soothed by hope, dignified by virtue, or consecrated by devotion.

If it be objected, that the duty recommended is impossible to be performed, that evil thoughts will intrude into the
heart

heart of man, though every pass be guarded with our utmost vigilance: it may be observed in return, that there is no duty of life, which is not impossible, in the same sense, and perhaps to the same degree. The most cautious conduct will not always secure us from the surprise of passion, or the allurements of pleasure: but who will assert that the obligations to virtue must therefore cease, because we cannot always strictly fulfil them? In the case before us, as in all others, our success may be incomplete, and our progress at the same time very important. A moderate share of attention will exclude many presumptuous thoughts, and chase away many seducing images: and even those, which force themselves upon us, will usually, if not entertained with indiscreet familiarity, be transient and harmless guests. It is the warmth of indulgence, which calls forth the powers of our bosom enemy,

my, and the fatal security of unsuspecting folly, which enables him to wound our peace.

PERHAPS it may be pleaded, that the numberless restrictions, which control and regulate our mutual intercourse with each other, however necessary, are still a burden; and that to impose, in addition to all these, a perpetual restraint on the free commerce of the mind, is to reduce the condition of human life to an anxious state of laborious and unceasing servitude.

Now even supposing this representation of our misery to be just, I fear we cannot extract from it any consoling inference. The law may be severe, but it is still the undoubted measure of our duty: and the same argument which displays the inquisitive rigour of an absolute and irresistible governor,

governor, is but to the subject an alarming proof that obedience is indispensable.

BUT the whole matter of the plea rests upon a false foundation. The indolent may dread the impossibility, and the libertine may deride the timorous scruples of exact obedience. We know, that the performance of a real obligation may be difficult but cannot be disgraceful: and even with respect to its difficulty, the toils of duty, however exaggerated, cannot be at all compared with the voluntary hardships, which the weakness of superstition has often submitted to, and the unwearied spirit of enthusiasm has often surmounted. Nor has it ever been shewn, that they have consulted either the ease or the happiness of life, who have rashly exchanged the stern discipline of virtue for the wild license of vice. For that freedom, which consists in the violation of the laws, whe-

ther

ther of God or man, is always ruinous in proportion to its extent : while moral restraints on the contrary are painful only as they are partial. The passion, which is often indulged, will indeed often rebel, but that which is steadily resisted will inevitably be subdued.

THE first difficulties in religion, and they are the usual causes of all the rest, arise not so much from our inability to perform its higher duties, as our propensity to slight its less important directions, not so much from the strong temptations to great crimes, as the fancied indifference of small irregularities. And it is the peculiar praise of the Christian Lawgiver, and in a practical view one great advantage of his system, that he has adapted his precepts to this circumstance in our nature ; that he has provided not only against the excessive prevalence of vice,
but

but its very first appearance and approach; and has laboured to inculcate, not any single affected effort of austere or ostentatious virtue, but the general habits of uniform and unambitious worth.

AMONG the many precepts of revelation, which are directed to facilitate our moral attainments, that, which perhaps contributes to this purpose the most powerfully, is the precept immediately under our consideration. The prudent government of our thoughts, it is certain, will greatly influence the whole of our future conduct; nor does it appear, that even the present discharge of it is attended with any difficulty, from which we need to shrink, or any peculiar hardship, of which we can reasonably complain. From this instance of obedience we can have no fears, that life will lose its chearfulness, or that moral beauty will put on a fullen and forbidding

bidding aspect. For pleasure itself is here decidedly on the part of duty, and our enjoyments are multiplied as our virtues are refined. The most exquisite luxury of the imagination is consistent with the purity of innocence: nor is it easy to conceive, what strange delight can be conveyed to an ingenuous temper by reflections, which excite the blush of shame or open the wounds of remorse. As for those men, who have destroyed the one, and banished the other of these useful, though it must be acknowledged painful and humiliating, sentiments, they are advanced to an eminence in vice, far beyond the limits of our present subject; yet even they will not pretend to have discovered any secret satisfaction, on which the wearied mind can repose with more complacency, or the gladdened spirit can exult with greater triumph, than that applauding consciousness which good men feel on the

the successful repulse of a rising passion, the faithful discharge of an important duty, or even the reluctant sacrifice of a beloved pleasure.

BUT were the difficulties attending the moral government of the heart more numerous and more formidable than even our weakness is inclined to fancy them, it is still our reasonable duty, and we want not motives to encourage our obedience.

FOR it will facilitate our progress in the active parts of our Christian duty; it will arm our resolutions with that manly and collected firmness, which is of equal efficacy to avoid the danger of surprise, and to resist the force of temptation: and it will enable our maturer virtues to reach a degree of eminence, which they otherwise cannot approach, and of reward which they cannot otherwise attain.

THAT

THAT obedience in this article has a tendency to promote our obedience in every other, is sufficiently obvious from the nature of the thing, and has been already the subject of some of the preceding observations.

THAT it increases the measure of excellence, which is attainable by human industry, is in some sense included in the former position; but there is also another sense, in which it is equally true, and equally important.

THE particular sphere of life, in which we are engaged, affords us occasions and inducements to the discharge only of its peculiar obligations; there will always therefore be many duties, which we have not opportunity to practise, and many, which we have not power to perform. But whatever narrow limits may circum-

scribe our actions, the virtues of the heart are dependent only on its own operations; and may therefore, with different degrees of success indeed, pervade the whole circuit of morals. The heart, which is carefully regulated, will be as sensible to the obligations of duty, where the exercise of it is denied, as it will be ready to obey them, whenever the act of obedience is demanded.

By these means we are not only gradually prepared for the future discharge of duty, but do actually acquire the excellence, at which we aim. For even where the opportunities to virtuous activity are most sparingly ministered, yet if the disposition to goodness be equally cultivated, the perfection required by religion is equally attained. And thus will our conduct, in every situation of life, retain the merit of obedience, though it may no longer

longer possess the force of an example; its influence on society may indeed be thwarted by a thousand accidents, but its effect on our own minds and our own happiness is dependent only on ourselves.

HERE then is an object worthy our ambition; and unless this object be at least in some measure accomplished, the virtuous efforts of the best dispositions will be often desultory and precarious, called forth only by chance, and directed by the feelings of the moment, rather than by the sober dictates of reason. *A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways**. Where the principles of faith, and it holds as strongly in morals, are unsettled and wavering, for that is here the sense of the word *double-minded*, the conduct of man will naturally partake of the instability of its foundation: and he who directs his steps by no uniform rule, can certainly

§ 2

§ 2

purſue

* James i. 8.

purſue no ſteady and conſiſtent courſe,
but will be *like a wave of the ſea, driven*
with the wind and tossed *.

NOR is this representation of mental
virtue to be conſidered only as a mere ſpe-
culative refinement; the obligation point-
ed out to our obſervance is clear and ſtrong,
and the improvement ſuggeſted to our
hopes real and important. We may ap-
peal to the voice of the Goſpel itſelf;
which while it requires the liberality of
our hands, under the limitations of poſ-
ſibility and prudence, demands that the
benevolent affections of our minds be ex-
tended univerſally to all, however remote
from the reach of our activity; not ſurely
for the benefit of thoſe, whom our love
will not gratify, and our hatred cannot
torment, whom our praiſes will not flattery
and our power cannot oppreſs; but for
our own ſakes undoubtedly this was writ-
ten;

* James v. 6.

ten; that the general principle of humanity and kindness might be so deeply and habitually impressed on our minds, that no prejudice should darken, and no selfishness absorb, that sacred ray of social love, which gilds the scene of man, and points out his kindred with the skies.

THE great and proper province of external action is to approve the strength and rectitude of our inward principles to our own judgement, and to realife and exemplify our virtues for the esteem and imitation of others. This is indeed the only medium, however dark and doubtful, through which the qualities of the mind are subject to our inspection: and though it will not always discover to us the hypocrisy of other men, it never fails, which is to us of more importance, to detect the decents of our own hearts. If our virtue be nothing more than a lifeless and barren

s 3

sentiment,

sentiment, if it bring not forth in their season the several fruits of good works, the conclusion cannot be avoided, our heart is unsound, and our principles insincere.

THIS then is the test, by which we ought to examine ourselves, and by which alone our characters are, or can be fixed, in the judgement of mankind; a tribunal which may be often deceived, but which no man of sense ever despised.

BUT there is another tribunal, at which we must all one day stand, the decisions of which are followed by more awful consequences, and directed by severer maxims. *God seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart* *. He collects not our principles by slow and doubtful inference from our mixed actions, but is a
discerner

* 1 Sam. xvi. 7.

discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart, and values our most splendid performances, only as they are derived from the genuine motives or habits of duty. *All things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him, with whom we have to do :* in his sight, *the form of godliness* cannot conceal the absence of its inward power, and the disposition to goodness, however unexercised, is not undistinguished. He sees and approves the resignation, which is yet untried by sufferings, and the spirit of generosity, which droops in the shade of poverty. And as the specious actions, which are performed from ostentatious and worldly motives, will hereafter be divested of their false lustre, and meet with their due recompence ; so the milder virtues, which have increased the happiness of men without courting their applause, and even the most hidden excellences of the heart, which want of opportunity or

power have doomed to unwilling inactivity, shall then be displayed, accepted, and rewarded, in the sight of men and angels. And while they, *who have prophesied in the name of Christ, and in his name done many wonderful works**, shall find, that their forward zeal for the public honour of religion will not atone for their contempt of its private duties; they, on the contrary, whose obscure virtues have never dazzled the eyes of men, shall by no means lose their reward, *for their Father which seeth in secret, himself shall reward them openly†*.

* *Match.* vii. 22.

† *Ib.* vi. 4.



MATTH. xxiii. 23.

THESE THINGS OUGHT YE TO HAVE DONE,
AND NOT TO LEAVE THE OTHER UNDONE.

IT was a point much laboured with the ancient Jews, to establish the distinction between the weighty and the lighter duties of life, and settle which was the great commandment of the Law. And many of them thought it honourable to their religion, as well as favourable to their own practice, to confer that distinguishing pre-eminence on one or other of the peculiar institutions of the Mosaic covenant: some of them giving the preference to Sacrifice, and others to Circumcision; some to the punctual observance of the Sabbath, and others to the scrupulous

lous payment of the tithes allotted for the support of the Temple and public worship of God. In opposition to these absurd opinions, which were founded on prejudice and passion, and could be maintained on no better principles, our Saviour informs them, that the great precepts of revealed religion are the precepts of Nature, the Love of God and the Love of Man : that positive Institutions must not be wantonly neglected, but that moral and religious duties are always invariably, and indispensably necessary. *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart ; and thy neighbour as thyself : there is none other commandment greater than these * . These things ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone.*

WE have seen the absurdities of the Jews ; and if we considered the conduct only of Christians, we should not be led

to

* Mark xii. 30, 31.

to conceive, that their sentiments on this subject were in general much more reasonable; the natural conclusion I fear might rather be, that the carnal inventions of the Jews had been improved and perfected by the refinements of their more enlightened successors; that not only the tithe of mint, anise, and cummin, but many even of the weightier matters of the law, judgement, mercy, and faith, were reckoned among the lighter obligations of life, which are violated without danger, and observed without praise.

It is not meant, nor indeed is it necessary to assert, that the greater vices are ever seriously defended; though there have not been wanting instances even of that last disgraceful effort of unblushing profligacy. For it is of small moment, what our opinions may be, while they fail in directing our conduct: they fail indeed
in

in some measure with respect to the most essential duties; but in the less important offices of life, they are often totally ineffectual; they are there not only contradicted in practice, but contradicted without reluctance, and without regret. Such are the offences, which under the title of the failings and follies of human nature plead for the forgiveness of God, and under the sanction of custom and fashion command the compliance of man. Such are the Sins, which most constantly beset us, and most easily foil our vigilance: and even when we are warned and convinced of the dangers to be dreaded from the greater vices, when we see the terrors of the Lord set in array against them, when fear and prudence persuade and compel our flight, we still weakly linger on the borders of Sin, we still fix our eyes on some prohibited retreat, some favourite indulgence, and cry out in the language of the Patriarch,

arch, O let me escape thither, is it not a
little one?*

INSTEAD of attempting to trace out
the nice line, which separates faults from
vices, or to discriminate those offences,
which are at least comparatively small,
from those which the world usually holds,
or wishes such; it shall be the business of
the present discourse to shew the import-
ance of unremitted attention to the least
duties; and it must be remembered, that
the same arguments, which recommend
these, will enforce the higher obligations
of life with superior weight.

IN treating this subject the following
points are to be considered:

I. THAT the limits of these lighter of-
fences are vague and indeterminate.

II. THAT

* Gen. xix. 20.

H. THAT the commission of them is dangerous in itself, as exposing us to punishment.

III. THAT it is dangerous also, as it peculiarly exposes us to the allurements of greater vices.

I. THE limits of these offences are very indeterminate.

EVEN the boundaries of Vice and Virtue are not always so distinctly marked, that we can clearly and infallibly pronounce, in what particular circumstances an action ceases to be laudable; where for instance generosity expands into profusion, or frugality is contracted into avarice. The same sort of difficulty will be found in comparing the different degrees of the same vice: and it is a difficulty, which if it be not more formidable than the former,

is

is certainly much more frequent; for all vices are capable of degrees, but all vices have not their kindred virtues. In this case also, errors are not only more probable, but more dangerous: by imprudently venturing to the extremity of Virtue, we may indeed touch on the borders of Vice; but if we once carelessly wander within her territories, we know not how far we may be seduced; what pleasures may invite our stay, and what obstacles may impede our retreat.

THE vices increase by slow and imperceptible gradations from the little wrongness, at which the mind is dissatisfied, to the murder, at which it shudders. Where then shall we place the line of separation? Most men perhaps will be inclined to place it a little beyond the point, they have already reached, the sin, they have already committed: the imaginary limit flees

flee at their approach; they go on with heedless steps, till at last they arrive at an eminence in vice, where if they see the danger of proceeding, they see too the difficulty of returning.

FURTHER, in fixing the limit between small and greater offences, beside the difficulties which rise from the nature of the subject itself, there are others also, which spring from the nature of man. We are all of us partial to our own defects; and many will treat the merest foibles of others, with a harshness and asperity, which scarcely any crimes should provoke; while their own vicious excesses are viewed with a favour, and indulgence, which the most pardonable failings cannot either deserve, or excuse. Under the bias of these selfish propensities, it is absolutely impossible that any man should constantly see and acknowledge the subtle distinctions, which
even

even the clear eye of unprejudiced reason cannot always easily or certainly discover.

NOR is this all; to the mistakes insinuated by Self-deceit, must be added the more numerous and more fatal errors obtruded by Public opinion. Man is the slave of habit; what he sees constantly, he sees without concern; and the vices, which in one age excite his abhorrence, are in another committed without reluctance or remorse: not because they are less heinous, but merely because they are more frequent. The Nations of the world seem to have supposed, that the divine laws resemble their own, where universal neglect amounts to a formal repeal. It would be painful to enumerate the many gross instances, in which the opinion of mankind, as well as their practice, has been unaccountably perverted. Even in the most moral writers of Greece and Rome, some of the most

T

detestable

detestable crimes are placed in a light, which shews not the smallest sense of their guilt. But what need is there of recurring to ancient or distant nations, when even in our own age and country, directed as we are by the united light of human learning and divine revelation, we can behold with unmoved indifference, the public conduct of men governed almost universally by no better motive, than the narrow views of sordid interest, and directed to no higher object, than the support of a friend, or the success of a party: and in private life, the opportunities to every excellence lost in dissipation, in the thoughtless pursuit of frivolous or forbidden pleasure; time, fortune, every blessing, and every virtue, destroyed in gaming; and even life itself sacrificed at the shrine of that relentless Idol, which modern folly has set up and worships, False Honour.

WE trust the day will yet come, when these representations of Christian manners will cease almost to be believed: in the mean time, if we wish, I do not say to destroy, but to resist the tyranny of fashion, we must guard with unwearied attention against the gradual encroachments of the smaller vices; for while we can reconcile ourselves to those sins, which we call trivial, we shall not preserve any lasting aversion to those, which are called so by others.

SINCE then the limits of these lighter offences are so uncertain in themselves, and so capriciously altered by private affection or public opinion, the only prudent as well as virtuous alternative left, is, to dismiss the whole train, and resolve on universal and unreserved obedience.

To this conduct we shall see further inducements, if we consider,

II. THAT the commission even of light offences is in itself dangerous, as exposing us to punishment.

THAT every indulgence of the least vicious inclination, and every neglect of the smallest duty, when not incompatible with some more essential obligation, is in itself, if not deeply, yet really and truly criminal, cannot be denied in words, however it may be disregarded in practice. The only question, which merits our attention is this, whether the law, which declares them crimes, has also declared them such crimes, as will be punished. Now, from Revelation, which is our rule of conduct, we learn that, on the due performance of certain conditions, the greatest crimes will be forgiven; and without the performance
of

of those conditions, I know not, on what authority we can pronounce, that the least will be wholly unpunished.

THE general assertion, that every vice requires our repentance, must indeed be understood with some reserve: for such is the nature of man, that he is perpetually guilty of errors, which he perhaps neither at the time perceives, nor afterwards recollects: and in this case he cannot so properly be answerable for the crimes themselves, as for the habit of inattention, which produced them.

Now that, with this restriction, every deviation from moral rectitude will come under the notice and censure of the great Governor of the world, is not only clear from the general holiness of the Christian precepts, which require us to endeavour at least *to be blameless and perfect in every*

good word and work; but also from the exprefs decision of the Author of our religion, who has determined, that the commandments, which forbid murder, adultery, and perjury, forbid also all causeless anger, all irregular desire, and all unnecessary oaths*: who has declared, that *for every idle word, that men shall speak, they shall give an account thereof in the day of Judgement*†: and who, by the mouth of his Apostle has taught us, that Christian virtue is inconsistent, not only with disobedience to the dictates of a decided conscience, but even with inattention to the scruples of a doubting mind; *for whatsoever is not of faith is sin*‡: and that Christian charity is wounded, not only when our example emboldens real vice, but even when it encourages those acts of indifference, which the weak, the ignorant, or the tender mind may fancy to be criminal;

* Matth. v. 22. 28. 34.

† Matth. xii. 36.

‡ Rom. xiv. 23.

criminal; for *when ye so sin against the brethren, and wound their weak consciences, ye sin against Christ* *.

HENCE therefore we see, that the least duties are seriously enjoined, and that actions in themselves the most indifferent, are very solemnly forbidden; surely then we have sufficient reason to apprehend, that however trifling a fault may in itself appear, yet if it be committed frequently, or perhaps constantly, if it be guarded against by no care, if it be atoned for by no remorse, such an accumulation of aggravating circumstances cannot but very largely contribute to fill up the measure of our guilt.

III. THE commission of lighter offences is dangerous also, as it peculiarly exposes us to the allurements of greater vices.

T 4

THE

* 1 Cor. viii. 12.

THE mind of man, from the constitution of nature, and the effects of education, is commonly so averse from vice, that it must have suffered many outward temptations and many inward struggles, before it can be brought to consider the deeper crimes without horror. By degrees only we become reconciled to the smallest deviations from duty. But when one vice has entered our heart, another solicits admission with the same importunity, and usually with the same success: till at length a wide door is opened for the great enormities; and the attention, which we purposed to reserve for important occasions, is at last paid to none.

THERE is no principle of human action more powerful than custom. In common life, its force is universally acknowledged; there is no habit so foolish, to which we may not be enslaved, no singularity so dis-

disgusting, to which we may not become reconciled ; we imitate the faults, which we only mean to expose ; and the peculiar manners, which are thoughtlessly adopted in trifling instances, will obstinately adhere to us on the most serious occasions, and in the most important transactions. So also in our moral conduct, the habit of yielding to the solicitations of pleasure or passion, though acquired in smaller matters, will certainly extend its power, and in various degrees affect almost every action of our lives : till what in youth was inattention, in age becomes indifference ; and what was once only a negligence of minuter articles, improves by repeated indulgence into a general disregard of every moral and religious duty.

OUR first excesses are commonly either weakly excused, as small, or presumptuously defended, as innocent : in both cases,

our

our subsequent conduct is involved in peculiar difficulties. For if, on any principles of argument, one vice be concluded harmless, the next in degree to it cannot be thought very noxious: and when once by imprudent concessions our reason is made the patron of Sin, it is impossible to foresee, how far we may be depraved: for of all the enemies of virtue, the most successful and the most persevering is perverted Reason.

If, on the other hand, we voluntarily yield to the temptations of any known sin, we surrender the arms, which would best defend us in our future conflicts; we give up all the advantages of success; our resolution is no longer nerved with the strength and spirit of victory; our hopes are no longer animated with the same important object.

FOR

For the object is now, not to preserve our Innocence, but only to limit and restrain our Guilt: and they, who have knowingly and designedly deserted the nobler cause, will not be very active or zealous in defence of the meaner.

THE Vices also are not only each of them capable of degrees, but many of them naturally allied and united to each other; and if any one be incautiously admitted, or unsuccessfully resisted, seldom will it fail to introduce a train of others more wicked and more dangerous than itself. Thus Gaming is alternately productive of the wildest profusion and the meanest dishonesty: Intemperance is the fruitful parent of a crowd of crimes: and the mixing in unguarded society with the profane and the profligate, which may sometimes be the effect of mere imprudence only, is it not

not the constant and common source of every vice, that can pollute our nature?

HENCE it appears, that even the least guilt cannot be admitted into the heart, without endangering its greatest and best qualities. And the man, who voluntarily offends in small points, if he with difficulty preserve any regard to duty, will but be engaged in a fruitless attempt, to regulate his conduct by two opposite principles, and divide his affections between God and Mammon.

BUT in this partial obedience there is one glaring absurdity, which both the wicked and the good will equally see and acknowledge: for while he incurs the guilt of sin, and submits to the restraints of religion, he foregoes the pleasures of the one, and forfeits the rewards of the other.

It

It has been very justly observed, that an attention to small matters is one of the most indisputable signs of improvement in virtue. It is indeed the last labour, which completes the trials of the returning sinner : and how many severe struggles must have been endured, before he could break the chains of habit, and silence the clamours of indulged passions. Happy is the man, who thus finishes the toils of duty ; but happier, far happier he, who thus begins them. Though he may not reach that high degree of perfection, to which he aspires, he is however always secure from the attacks of gross and grovelling vices : for Virtue must be weakened by many failings, before it can be subdued by such disgraceful enemies. Attention indeed is necessary to him, as well as to others : and he wisely prefers the chearful vigilance of early innocence, to the sorrowful and anxious watchings of late

late repentance. He knows, that the life of a Christian is a state of warfare; the combat may be delayed, but not avoided: he therefore exerts his strength, while unimpaired, while success is yet easy, and its triumphs complete. These are advantages, we must all of us remember, which, if once lost, can be no longer regained. When the power of vicious habits is confirmed, it can only be reduced by a long series of painful conflicts: in this situation, a single victory is attended with scarcely any perceptible effect, but a single defeat will too often decide our fate; for on the slightest failure, while fear dissuades, and passion betrays, our hopes and resolutions die within us, the smallest difficulty forms an insuperable obstacle, and every object, which is not immediately within our reach, is hastily relinquished, as beneath our ambition, or beyond our attainment.

IF

It therefore we wish to discharge the higher offices of life with consistence and firmness, to do those things, which certainly and confessedly *ought to be done*; there is no duty, how unimportant soever, which can be safely disregarded; and there is nothing connected with virtue, how slightly soever, but prudence as well as religion will direct us *not to leave it undone*.



(- 008 -)

ROM. xii. 2.

BE NOT CONFORMED TO THIS WORLD.

HYPOCRISY is the acting of a part, the assuming of a fictitious character. Its effects are discernible in every period of our existence, and in every part of our conduct; in the common and indifferent, as well as in the moral, and more important transactions of life. In Religion, it may shew itself in the pretending, either to more virtue, than a man really possesses, or to more vice, than he is willing to commit. The former mode of action is usually distinguished by the term Hypocrisy; while the latter is in common language imperfectly described by the

U

gentler

gentler appellation of False Shame. I say imperfectly described, because it does not always, or perhaps even generally arise from misplaced modesty, from that excessive softness of temper, which we may lament and reprove, but cannot very rigidly condemn. On the contrary, the affectation of vice will appear, both from its origin and effects, to be often entitled to a full share of the severest reproach, which the worst and most contemptible species of hypocrisy can deserve. It springs from the same source; a desire to unite those inconsistent pleasures and advantages, which no uniform conduct can reconcile: it betrays an equal or greater meanness of spirit; for shame is by no means the natural attendant of virtue: and it produces effects of at least equal malignity, by drawing the example of numbers into the service and support of sin. With respect to the persons themselves who are thus

thus guilty, if it be the less odious, it is also perhaps the more dangerous extreme. Imitation often becomes the very thing, which it was originally meant to feign. The pretender to virtue, from the native beauty of the object, to which, with whatever view, he must constantly attend, or from the conversation and example of those, with whom he must frequently mix, has some chance of loving and acquiring the character, which he endeavours only to assume: while the rash pretender to vice will hardly avoid involving himself in crimes, which reason bids him abhor, and which all the force of passion has not prevailed on him to commit.

THESE different sorts of hypocrisy, though they will appear indiscriminately in men of all ages, dispositions, and distinctions, have yet each of them its favourite character, which it peculiarly loves

to influence. Thus the one is more generally found in the young, and the other in the aged: because in youth, the rigid virtues are not unfrequently, to the eye of a perverted world, even more disgraceful than its natural vices; while the acquired appetites of age often cannot be completely gratified without the appearance of virtue. It is to be observed likewise, that the successful imitation of virtue demands the constant exertions of a cautious, experienced, and designing mind: but the affectation of vice is an obvious, artless thing, requiring no other quality than irresolution and rashness, and therefore suited equally to the timid temper, which distrusts its firmest convictions, when opposed by reproach and ridicule, or to the bold unthinking spirit, which from confidence in its strength, or blindness to its danger, does not uniformly follow

low the guidance of reason, nor willingly submit to the restraints of prudence.

IN the following observations it is intended to consider distinctly, the different degrees, motives, and consequences of that hypocrisy, which is employed in conforming ourselves to this world, in assuming the qualities of vice, or concealing those of virtue.

SUPPOSE a man convinced, that his personal safety depended on the virtue of his fellow-creatures, it would certainly be his interest, if it were not also his duty, to avoid every thing, which has the remotest tendency to loosen the ties of morality, or lessen the actual influence of religion. But when he is further persuaded, that not only his own security, but the preservation of human society, and the present and future happiness of every

individual in that society, are in various ways dependent on the same principle; that he is himself stationed by the Author of nature, to watch over the interests of virtue, to cultivate its graces in his own breast, and recommend it to the pursuit and attention of others: if such an one were merely silent in the cause of goodness, and heard the doctrines of religion and the obligations of morality traduced and ridiculed without an effort in their defence; it would surely be deemed a strange desertion of duty, and an unaccountable breach of the important trust committed to his charge. Yet strange and unaccountable as it may seem, the situation supposed is the situation of man, and the conduct observed in it one of the most common of human failures.

If then to suffer the insolence of vice without indignation, and without reproof,
be

be a weakness, which cannot be defended; what shall we say of him, who listens to the voice of the charmer with indulgence and pleasure? who pays the liberal tribute of admiration and applause, on every lively remark, on every ludicrous allusion, without considering that there are serious and important subjects, where wit is impertinent, and ridicule profane?

BUT whatever indulgence may be shewn to the faults of others, it might however have been reasonably expected, that no man, who had not made a very considerable progress in the ways of vice, would prostitute his own understanding in her service, and use a language so little consistent with the plainest dictates of the human heart. Yet there are not wanting those, who, from whatever motives, do not scruple to speak lightly, where they by no means think lightly, where the im-

portance of the subject is seen and acknowledged, and the moral consequences of misplaced raillery are too conspicuous to be mistaken, and too dreadful to be disregarded.

NOR do the triumphs of hypocrisy end here. There are men, who, with perverse ambition, will aspire to the credit or advantage of vices, in the guilt of which they by no means intend to partake; who will raise and encourage suspicion, while they secretly rejoice in its falsehood; and will appear outwardly the enemies of that virtue, which they inwardly revere. The complicated weakness, guilt, and hazard of this disingenuous behaviour will be sufficiently seen, if we duly consider its motives and tendencies; that it usually springs from the want of discretion or of spirit, and mixes in its course with every vice, that can pollute and degrade our nature.

THE

THE temptations to this unworthy conduct, it must indeed be allowed, are many and various; they meet us in different periods of life, and act with different degrees of strength; some of them mislead us but a little way, others entangle us in deeper and more dangerous errors; the power of some is limited to certain cases, while that of others extends universally to every part of human intercourse; some plunge us early in vice, others are slower in their operations, but by dint of perseverance at length equally successful. Thus the fear of disobliging men, if unmixed with interested or other views, will usually end in mere neutrality; it will indeed never suffer us to rebuke vice, nor will it perhaps often tempt us to commit it. In like manner, the fear of singularity affects us only in certain circumstances; unpopular virtues must be avoided, or disguised, and fashionable vices must be indulged,

ed, or at least affected; but in all other instances of duty, we are left without bias to the direction of our own judgement. The effects of false shame are similar but more general; they are not limited by the conduct of others, but wide as the range of fancy, and various as its fears. There is also an absurd kind of vanity, the motions of which are irregular, but violent: it pants after eminence of any sort, and, if it take a wrong direction, and engage us in improper pursuits, will hurry us headlong to the extremes of vice. Self-interest, on the other hand, is a cool and sedate motive; it does not usually spring up early in the mind, nor is it of rapid growth; but where it has once taken deep root, it spreads wide, is checked with difficulty, and seldom, if ever, totally subdued.

AMONG all these discouragements to virtue, there is no one, which acts in its
own

own sphere with more prevailing force than the dread of singularity: and unfortunately, its influence has been carried far beyond its natural bounds, by the peculiarities of those, who certainly meant not to do the evil, which they have caused. The intercourse of man with his Creator partakes of his infirmities; the devotional affections are by some sublimed into enthusiasm, and by others degraded into superstition. The consequence has been, that the pure substance of Religion is by many confounded with its corruptions, and the least appearance of it often meets with the same treatment with its wildest excesses. And while even men of elegant letters, forgetting their liberal professions of candour and openness, will, many of them, almost constantly express themselves on the subject of religion in such terms, as are applicable only to its worst abuses; we cannot wonder, that some of their

thoughts

thoughtless admirers, in their eagerness to avoid one extreme, should carelessly rush into the other; and without discovering the temperate mean, which is so studiously concealed from them, should blindly abandon themselves to the coldness of indifference, or the darkness of unbelief.

ANOTHER motive, which frequently induces us to put on the disguise of vice, is False Shame. It is indeed matter of great and just complaint, that there are few things, of which men seem to be more ashamed, than of their religion. Their vices display themselves openly and before the sun; while their modest virtues shrink from the eye of observation; the pious stealth is committed with a guilty blush, and concealed with disgraceful care. Or, if by chance they are betrayed into an act of goodness, which cannot easily avoid detection, they have still the art of disclaiming

claiming its merit, by ascribing it to some mean and unworthy motive. Thus decency is become a more fashionable term than duty; and attendance on the offices of devotion is oftener excused than justified: it is a deference due to the public opinion, the public manners, the public authority, or in short any thing, excepting only what it should be, the conscientious observance of our own religious obligations. But surely nothing can be more fatal to the cause of virtue, than the weakness and treachery of such a defence: which instead of the life and substance of Religion, deludes us with an empty form; and for the spirit and energy of virtue, presents us with the pageantry of appearances, and the mere outside of constrained decorum.

ANOTHER motive, and the last I shall at present enlarge on, is Vanity: the progress

gress of which is so rapid, as scarcely to leave any discernible interval between the affectation of vice and its reality. On entering the great scene of the world, a rash and forward temper, ambitious of distinction and impatient of control, is very apt to mistake the boldness and novelty of opinions for a mark of truth and genius; and to consider the neglect of rule and contempt of restraint, as a sure test of superior spirit. Hence in theory he becomes a professed admirer of liberal sentiment and unconfined enquiry; he praises what he cannot approve, assents to what he does not understand, rejects the common notions of common sense, to shew his depth of reflection, and to prove incontestably his liberty of thought, submits without reserve to the authority of every positive Infidel. In practice also, he suddenly ventures, with full confidence in his own firmness, to mix with the vices, he really

really abhors, for the sake of the loose gaiety and the daring spirit, which he fondly admires. His first and most arduous effort is to calm the painful emotions of a naturally good heart: by degrees he learns to suspend the rising sentiments of virtue, he catches the language and manners of his companions, from whence there remains but one short step to their vices.

WE come now to consider the consequences of thus assuming the character and appearance of vice. Its effects on ourselves have been in some measure anticipated. I shall only observe therefore, that the passions thus indulged, will continue their importunity; that the same conduct, which leads to the confines of guilt, will most frequently expose us to the attacks of temptation; that we shall meet the assault in the hour of weakness,

under

under every disadvantage of situation and circumstance, softened by pleasure, attracted by example, and encouraged by persuasion. It must be remembered also, that when we have once tamely submitted to the meanness of a vicious disguise, we are already half subdued, we have lost that dignity of spirit, and delicacy of sentiment, which are the truest support of innocence, and the noblest ornament of virtue.

BUT however doubtful its effects may be on ourselves, with whatever industry and skill we may hope to conquer its difficulties and escape its dangers; still on the conduct of others they will be equally fatal and unavoidable. Where the deception succeeds, our behaviour has all the effects of positive guilt; it equally adds to the number of pernicious examples, it lays the same discouragements in the way
of

of virtue, and affords the same matter of triumph to the cause of vice. But if what was at first an appearance only, grow and ripen, as is its natural tendency, into real and habitual guilt, we shall reap only the bitter fruits of shame and self-dislike: yet not even the total failure of our hopes, can correct the evil of our example; for many are still induced to copy the deformities of our conduct, and to suppose it innocent in itself, and harmless in its consequences; while they flatter themselves with the vain expectation, that their own superior caution and contrivance will effectually secure them from the danger of corruption, and the disgrace of detection. Self-confidence is rarely humbled but by its own experience. And especially if we consider, how eager men are in the pursuit of present pleasure, and how glad of the weakest pretext to deceive their own hearts, we shall not wonder, that they so

often hastily catch at a scheme, however big with absurdity, which pretends to unite many of the advantages of vice with all the innocence of virtue.

How far the innocence of virtue is really consulted, and how long it is preserved, if there be any force in the preceding observations, we shall be at no loss to discover. I hope it has sufficiently appeared, that the practice condemned is in every instance a departure from the line of duty, that the further it is continued, the more widely it deviates, till at last it is remote indeed from the plain and open paths, *which God hath prepared, that we should walk in them.*

As to the advantages of vice, which are thus secured, they are certainly very different in different circumstances, though probably not very considerable in any. But
be

be they, what they may, they are all greatly overbalanced by the single consciousness of having discharged the duties of life with sincerity and dignity. Even if we suppose the advantages promised to be great as man can conceive, and lasting as the world can give; still they will bear not the slightest comparison with the weight and magnitude of our future and immortal interests. And how intimately these are connected with our resolutions in this particular, we may learn from the declaration of our Saviour himself; *Whoever shall be ashamed of me, and of my words, in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels* *. These words are too plain to need a comment. But lest we should deceive ourselves with any false refinements on the nature and motives of this shame, with

any

* Mark viii. 38.

any subtle distinctions on the peculiarities of our own case, we are assured by the same authority; *He, that loveth father or mother more than me, is not worthy of me: and he, that loveth son or daughter more than me, is not worthy of me: and he, that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me* *.

IF therefore the natural affection of parents and children, the ties of kindred; the attachments of friendship, the allurements of pleasure, the views of interest, and even the charms of life itself, will not excuse our guilt; if he, who prefers not the commands of Christ to any, or even to all these powerful and engaging motives, be not worthy of him, be not one, whom he will own or reward; what remains, but that we reject the trivial inducements, which so often prevail over us, with the contempt they deserve, and shew

* Matth. x. 37, 38.

shew by a steady adherence to the dictates of our reason, that we dare to be virtuous; that the spirit and fortitude of Christians, which, in the ages of violence, so constantly supported the terrors of persecution, can also, in an age of corruption, successfully resist the milder influence of persuasion and fashion, unmoved by the force of ridicule, undisturbed by the fear of singularity, and uninfected by the contagion of example.



ROM. iii. 8.

AND NOT RATHER, AS WE BE SLANDER-
OUSLY REPORTED, AND AS SOME AFFIRM
THAT WE SAY, LET US DO EVIL, THAT
GOOD MAY COME.

YOU see with what earnest zeal
the Apostle vindicates himself, and
his associates in converting the world,
from the imputation of having lent their
authority to this pernicious maxim; a
maxim, which renders the rule of life
uncertain, and represents faith, as mak-
ing void the law; which would set reli-
gion at variance with the plainest dictates
of reason and conscience, and justify those
acts of perfidy, at which honour blushes,

and those scenes of cruelty, which humanity deplores,

IF we attend to the train of reasoning, in which this maxim is alluded to, we shall readily discover the propriety of its introduction, and more than one instance of its application.

ON mentioning the rejection of the disobedient and unbelieving Jews, the Apostle, in the verses immediately preceding the text, supposes one of that nation to expostulate with him in these words: *If our unrighteousness commend the righteousness of God, what shall we say? Is God unrighteous, who taketh vengeance?* The Apostle answers, *God forbid; for then how shall God judge the world?* that is, the same argument, which you oppose to the rejection of your nation, to the particular dispensation, of which you complain, will apply with equal force
to

to the general dispensation of God, which you allow, in the final condemnation of sinners. For if God be an unrighteous Being, he is not qualified to judge the world: and if the plea, you alledge, be admitted in your case, it must be admitted equally in all; and there will then remain no sinners to be judged. The Jew continues, or explains, his argument further; *For if the truth of God hath more abounded through my lie (or my unbelief) unto his glory, why yet am I also judged as a sinner?* The Apostle again reminds him in the words of the text, that the same reasoning, which he brings to excuse his unbelief, might be urged for the impunity of all sin whatsoever; and that on these principles might be defended even that detestable maxim, with which the Christians had been maliciously reproached, *Let us do evil, that good may come,*

It was therefore no sufficient apology for the conduct of the Jews, either that their unrighteousness had illustrated the righteousness of God, in still performing the promises made to their fathers, or, that their unbelief and refusal of the Gospel had eventually contributed to its success, in the call and conversion of the gentile world.

NOR will the plea, which is denied to the Jew, avail the disciple of Christ. This is expressly asserted in a subsequent chapter, where the Apostle, having magnified the grace of God in the pardon of sin, and the redemption of mankind, introduces a convert to Christianity as drawing from the doctrine, he had delivered, this weak and wrong conclusion; *What shall we say then? shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?* The Apostle replies with

with warmth, *God forbid; how shall we, who are dead to sin, live any longer therein?* Is it credible, or possible, that the same religion, which requires us to be as incapable of sin, as the dead are of the actions which belong to the living, should itself afford any the least pretext to the continued indulgence of our sinful habits?

THE event of our actions is in the hand of God; and the only point, which we are required to consider, is, not the effects, which they may possibly produce, but the motives and principles, on which they are deliberately performed. We are indeed commanded; *whatsoever we do, to do all to the glory of God**. But the precept must plainly be understood with the same restriction, which, as the Apostle informs us, was observed even in the contests for earthly fame, *in which if a man strive, and with whatever success, yet is he not crowned,*

* 1 Cor. x. 31.

crowned, unless he strive lawfully *. Now to us the only lawful and appointed means of contributing to this great end, the glory of God, are habitual virtue and unaffected piety: and if we will use unlawful means, it concerns us seriously to remember, that we must ourselves abide the consequences of our own choice. *God hath no need of the sinful man* †. Vain therefore and impious are all fanatical pretences of promoting his glory by the crimes, which he has forbidden. Even the purest efforts of virtue must be carefully guarded from this presumption. *Can a man be profitable unto God? Or is it gain to him, that thou makest thy way perfect* ‡? The glory of God depends not on the agency of mortals; it is represented indeed as increased by the conduct of virtuous men; but it is equally displayed in his treatment of all his creatures. The best are instances of his mercy,

the

* 2 Tim. ii. 5.

† Ecclus xv. 12.

‡ Job xxx. 2, 3.

the worst shall be examples of his justice. He shews the riches of his goodness in accepting the humble faith of the returning penitent: and he can also *get himself honour* on the proudest and most obdurate sinners, if not in the wonder of their conversion, yet in the awfulness of their punishment.

HAVING considered the instances, to which the Apostle has himself applied the principle, he so severely condemns; let us proceed to examine some of the cases, in which the same principle more particularly influences the manners of later ages.

MANY writers on morals have considered utility as the criterion of virtue. Will it not therefore follow in contradiction to the Apostle, that nothing can be evil, from which good will come? To enter on the merits of the opinion itself in

in a Christian audience, whose rule of life is, not the uncertain deduction of unassisted reason, but the perfect law of divine revelation, must be unnecessary; yet to guard against the dangerous inferences, which may be derived from it, when wrongly understood or incautiously applied, can never be improper; and especially, since utility is often pointed out by the Christian teacher, not indeed as the only characteristic of virtue, but as one of its many powerful motives, it thence becomes of considerable importance, that we determine the true nature of the utility, which is thus ascribed to virtue. This utility then is not the separate effect of a single act, how highly or diffusively beneficial soever it may prove, but the general consequence of all actions of the same kind, supposing them permitted without limitation, and practised universally and without restraint. Now many of
the

the most odious and contemptible crimes may be accompanied with accidental, temporary, or partial expedience; but there is nothing, except virtue alone, which can at all pretend to be thus uniformly conducive to the happiness of the individual, and the permanent welfare of society.

Vice is indeed attended with many allurements, with many present pleasures and advantages; and these it is the general business of moral instruction and discipline to enable us to resist and forego. But the particular good, which we are forbidden by the Apostle to pursue, is such a good, as does not merely tempt us to commit evil, but is speciously or commonly urged to excuse or even vindicate our compliance.

Of this there are many examples.

I. PER-

I. PERSECUTION for religious opinions is confessedly doing evil, that good may come; for what is its avowed object, but either the particular good done to the persons converted, or the general good produced by the promotion of true religion? Whether it have any real tendency to accomplish either of these ends, is more than doubtful. But were the benefits arising from it ever so certain, and ever so important, still it would come within the limits of the Apostle's prohibition; for persecution is an evil unauthorised by nature or the Gospel, and therefore a moral evil; an evil, which we are forbidden to commit, whatever good may be expected, or actually derived from it. I would only add further, that not magistrates alone may be thus guilty, but individuals also may very effectually, and therefore very sinfully persecute each other. With this crime we are manifestly chargeable, if we wilfully

wilfully misrepresent the character, the conduct, or the tenets of those, who differ from us, merely because they differ from us; if we think of them with rancour, or treat them with injustice; if we deny them protection in danger, or assistance in distress; or even if, without any acts of positive unkindness, we refuse them the common civilities of common life. *These things, my brethren, ought not so to be*: they are most of them contrary to the natural law of universal equity; they are all of them wide deviations from the revealed law of universal charity.

PERHAPS it may be asked, if persecution for opinions be doing evil, that good may come, and therefore in all cases forbidden; will not the punishment of crimes also come under the same description, and consequently be, for the same reason, and to the same extent, indefensible? I answer

Y

no,

no, because the punishment of crimes is authorised by the laws both of God and man: the evil therefore so inflicted, when it exceeds not its due proportion, is not a moral evil, not the kind of evil, which is forbidden to be done from the prospect of insuring a greater good.

II. THE obligations to truth, though in general acknowledged to be of the very highest importance, are yet on many occasions of seeming convenience or utility, very liberally dispensed with. Not to insist on the slighter instances, in which falsehood is professedly indulged, as prescribed by the forms, or conducive to the convenience of fashionable intercourse; unnecessary misrepresentations are also very freely allowed, when directed to produce any trivial good, or avert any unimportant evil, to create amusement, to flatter vanity, to soften disappointment; or when they

they only do, or are intended to do, no harm. Even sordid interest can plead for its disgraceful exceptions; and in many transactions of life, truth is so often violated, that it ceases almost to be expected. The voice of reproach is scarcely heard; especially when the injury, for an injury there must be, is of such a nature, as affects not the rival interest of any private sufferer. In this case not only the laws of truth, but even the solemnity of an oath is boldly disregarded. The sanctions of religion may perhaps be interposed on too many, and on too slight occasions; but that is surely no excuse for the extreme irreverence and impiety of their conduct, who wantonly convert the most awful test of human veracity into an empty and unmeaning form.

To affirm, that all these offences are of equal malignity, were absurd: to allow

of no deviations however minute, under any possible circumstances, were perhaps unreasonably severe; but yet the serious and prudent moralist, who considers the use and necessity of the general principle, will certainly confine his exceptions within very narrow limits.

FUTURE ages at least will assuredly regard it as a strange inconsistency in manners; that the same persons, who can be, in so many points, and to so great a degree, inattentive to the laws of truth, who can justify the neglect of them in some cases, and excuse it in many more, should yet consider the imputation of falsehood in all cases whatsoever, as an atrocious attack on the character, which it is impossible ever to pardon, and which even life itself not only may, but must be hazarded to repel.

III. THIS observation naturally leads me to another breach of moral duty, which, notwithstanding its dreadful consequences, is often vindicated on pretence of its utility, as being a necessary mean to preserve the decency of human intercourse; an argument, which falsely represents the present state of manners as requiring a restraint unheard of in every former period, and absurdly guards the external decorum of Society by the same sanctions, which are applied to maintain its welfare and its safety.

IF such a restraint had been necessary, how could the world have existed through a long series of so many ages without its assistance? If it were so obviously useful, why was it unknown to the most polished and enlightened nations of antiquity? And shall the barbarous invention of an age of darkness and ferocity supersede the

wisdom and experience of antiquity, in direct opposition to the laws of our country, and the very first principles of our religion?

THE practice of the nations, ignorant as they were, from whom this absurd custom was transmitted, though not founded on reason, was at least conducted with consistency. They imagined the duel to be a solemn appeal to the god of battles; and therefore applied it to the administration of their public justice, and to the final decision of their most difficult and important causes. But the same transaction on the light pretences of modern honour can be reconciled to the ideas of no times but our own. To the cultivated reason of the Greek, it would seem madness, and to the rude piety of the Barbarian, profaneness.

EVEN

EVEN with respect to present times and present manners, it must be considered as a circumstance equally singular and disgraceful; that the custom, which both reason and religion condemn, should yet prevail in those nations of the world, and those only, which are confessedly the great masters of human reason, and which profess the purest and most beneficent of all religions.

THE general principle therefore, on which this ferocious practice is supported, as being founded on the nature and exigencies of polished society, is at least very disputable. And were it less so, were all the advantages, which can be hoped for, perfectly certain and secure; were the little inconveniences, which may be felt or feared from occasional petulance or rudeness, in a great degree diminished, or even totally prevented; yet surely these

trifles may be purchased at too dear a rate; surely they cannot be at all compared with the serious evil, that is brought on the community, as often as it is deprived of the solid services of an active, intelligent, and virtuous individual.

It deserves also to be considered, that as no interest of Society can require the security of its innocent and peaceful members to be needlessly lessened, the expedience of duelling, whatever it may be, is founded on this presumption, that the person who makes the appeal to its decision, is at least generally the injured person. But if the contrary do very frequently happen, if the laws of honour be enforced on occasions confessedly frivolous, and often manifestly unjust, if they arm the man of violence, whom they pretend to control, if they expose the ordinary intercourse of life to danger as well as insult, and

and thus aggravate the very evils they were intended to remedy; then is the practice at open variance with the principle, on which it is supported. It is a cruel infringement on the dearest right of human beings, it atones not for its particular consequences by any great and general good, and even to the attainment of its own little end, it is but seldom and by accident directed. Should however the advocate for duelling insist, that the balance of utility on the whole still inclines in his favour; yet surely an expediency so weak and unimportant both in its nature and degree cannot be successfully, or even seriously pleaded in a cause, which nothing less than absolute and uncontrollable necessity would fully justify.

FURTHER, the practice, we are treating of, is not only thus irrational in its general principle, and when considered with

with respect to the public; but with respect to individuals also, and in each particular instance, the means employed in duelling are often absolutely unconnected with any object of pursuit, that can be assigned, or even imagined.

To meet danger with calmness is indeed a proof of courage, but surely no test either of veracity or honour; and, of whatever nature the injury received may be, to put the life of the aggressor and your own to the same risk, is neither reparation, nor punishment, nor revenge. It may shew, that you are not insensible, that you feel, when you are insulted; but surely the same thing may be as naturally and as effectually shewn in many ways of less danger, and of less guilt. But it will prevent such offences in future. The plea might be urged for assassination itself. If humanity shudder at the suggestion, if to
destroy

destroy the life even of the guilty for such a purpose, be an enormity surpassing the common measures of human depravity; can you think it quite rational, to hazard for the same purpose the lives of both the guilty and the innocent?

You appeal from the bar of reason to that of honour. Now so far as the general practice is concerned, the appeal to honour is totally unavailing; for how can honour justify custom, from which alone it derives its own existence and support? With respect to individuals indeed the opinion of the world, however fantastic, and however wrong, will always in fact possess a very considerable influence. Like the other temptations to which we are exposed, it is in proportion to its force a mitigation of the offence: but to mitigate is not to vindicate; for if temptation be considered, not as the trial of our fortitude,

tude, but the justification of our compliance; if custom and fashion may usurp without control the proper province of reason and conscience, there is an end of all obligation and of every virtue.

AND certainly if in any instance it be our duty, and our wisdom, *to obey God rather than man*, it must be in the case now before us; where misconduct flatters us with no prospect of advantage, and can gratify none but the painful and hostile passions of our nature; and where the consequence must be, not only danger to ourselves, but anxiety and sorrow, it may be, distress, and misery, and ruin, to the very persons, whom we are bound to protect and support by every human obligation, by interest, by duty, and even by honour itself.

IV. THESE

IV. THESE are instances in our moral and religious conduct, where evil is deliberately committed, that good may come. It were easy to add to the number; but it may be more useful, from the particular circumstances of the present moment, to consider the same principle in its application to our civil conduct.

HERE it has always been indulged a much wider range, and seems to be now extending itself far beyond all sober limits.

WITH those men indeed, who have nothing more in view, than to supply the defects, or correct the abuses, which may be thought still to remain in the theory or practice of our government, so long as they strictly confine themselves within the legal bounds of peaceful, temperate, and constitutional measures, so long as they do no evil in pursuit of this real or
ima-

imaginary good, with them we have properly no concern.

YET even they may be reminded, that unguarded displays of the little imperfections discoverable in a few parts of our excellent constitution, may afford some countenance to those, who depreciate and despise the whole; that the best remedies, when imprudently administered, may possibly but increase the complaint, they are meant to remove; and that it is no longer time to attend with minute curiosity to the regularity and beauty of a structure, when the foundations of it are endangered, and the edifice itself threatened with ruin.

For there are men, who are labouring to introduce the most serious evils, who invite us, not to resist oppression and tyranny, but to subvert the constitution itself,

self, to abolish established order and government, to destroy every thing useful and venerable, and dissolve the very bonds and union of society. But let us not sacrifice our interest, our country, and our duty, to vain and extravagant speculations. The rules of obedience to government, which religion enjoins, are too well known to need explaining, though neglected to a degree, which is equally disgraceful to us as subjects and as Christians: but because in a former age they were absurdly carried to an impracticable extent, are they therefore to be wholly disregarded in the present? or because they confessedly admit of exceptions in some cases, are they therefore of no force in any case whatever? Our ancestors, who loved liberty with as much ardor and sincerity, as we can do, but pursued it with more discretion, wisely confined their exceptions to extreme cases; they considered resist-

ance

ance to authority as an awful and important right, which necessity will always exert, and which nothing but necessity can ever justify.

AND where is the necessity, or even the expedience of abandoning our ancient constitution? a constitution, which we have long revered with an almost enthusiastic devotion; which we have been taught to consider as the envy of all nations, and the distinguishing glory of our own; which (how great or how many soever its defects may be) has in fact produced prosperity and happiness; and which, after the many improvements it has received in each successive age, is now so nicely balanced, that, as we have seen in the course of our own experience, the several powers can effectually control each other, and are all of them in fact controlled by the voice of the nation itself.

THESE

THESE are surely recommendations of no common kind ; and shall we then relinquish a system, which does produce happiness, and which does secure the liberties of the people ? Shall we relinquish a system, which we thus know to be good, and which the wisdom of ages hath approved, for a wild and visionary project, of which the world has hitherto had no experience ? Or shall we change the blessing, we so justly value, for a state of misrule and anarchy, which will long suspend, and may possibly prove fatal to, order, happiness, and freedom ?

THE popular plea of these unfeeling theorists, who would force on us, at whatever risk, their crude and untried notions, is taken from the condition of the poor.

THAT this is too frequently miserable, no man can possibly deny ; but at the

Z

same

same time it ought to be remembered, that the laws of this country alone have attempted to make a national and constant provision for want and infirmity, and have not left the poor to the charity, but given them a legal claim on the justice of their fellow citizens; that the humanity of our laws has been seconded by innumerable public establishments for the education of the young, the care of the deserted, the relief of the sick, the retreat and comfort of the aged; and, we trust, that private benevolence is seldom wanting to alleviate those distresses, which escape the public notice, or come not within the limits of public institutions.

STILL however poverty and unhappiness will remain: and the cause lies not in the defects of this or that particular government, but in the general constitution of the world, and the condition of human

human nature itself. Even the chosen people of God were not exempted from the common lot: though their land was originally divided among their tribes and according to their families; though every seventh year brought with it the release of debts; and in the year of jubile they *returned every man unto his possession* *; yet notwithstanding these extraordinary provisions, they were assured by their Legislator himself, that *the poor should never cease out of the land* †.

SUCH are the dispensations of the mysterious providence, by which we are governed, which it is impious to arraign, and impossible to resist. Such are the sufferings, which exercise the patience and resignation of one part of mankind, and claim from the other, by every argument of affection and duty, the utmost

* Lev. xxv. 13.

† Deut. xv. 11.

most exertions of benevolence in their alleviation.

For alleviations are all, that humanity can effect, or the state of the world will admit. In civilised societies, however constituted, *the rich and the poor meet together*; the distinction between them is necessary, and useful to both; the inconveniences attending it may be gradually and greatly lessened in the way, which Nature has appointed, by the care and protection of the wise and the powerful, by the beneficence of the rich, and above all by the prudence and virtue of the poor themselves; but rash and violent efforts to counteract the designs of nature, and subvert the order of society, can only end in disappointment and misery; the evils of life will still remain, and with this terrible aggravation, that the power and means of relieving them are
taken

taken away. Universal riches is a visionary, unattainable good: but universal poverty is the natural consequence of public tumult and confusion; and must unavoidably prevail, where order is interrupted, and property is insecure, where industry is bereft of its reward, and commerce is deprived of all the means which are necessary not only to its extension but existence.

If we refuse to listen to the calm suggestions of reason and duty, let us be however deterred by the warning voice of experience; happy at least in one point, that the experience is not our own. This will inform us, that revolutions, begun on the justest principles, have often been productive of the most unjustifiable consequences: and those, which have commenced with the most moderate views,

have often ended in the most destructive excesses. We might instance in the history of our own nation; but the example of a neighbouring people must force itself at present on the mind and recollection of every one.

THE story of their calamities and their crimes is too shocking to bear repeating, and too well known to need it. Yet they began on motives of importance, perhaps of necessity. And if the first authors of liberty, in their zeal to inculcate the captivating theory of the rights of man, forgot to insist upon the less palatable doctrine of his obligations; if they carried their reformation to an extent inconsistent even with their own principles, and were sometimes guilty of unnecessary and unwarrantable violence; the errors, they committed, have been in some sort atoned for,

for, by their subsequent sufferings; and the evils, they caused, are scarcely remembered amidst the distressful and atrocious scenes, that have since excited the compassion and indignation of every human breast; and that have closed, if they yet be closed, with a deed of dreadful magnitude *, in which we see not the justice of a great nation, or the wicked prudence of an usurper, or the imperious dictate of necessity; but the unaccountable fury of a populace, who had neither oppression to fear, nor resistance to encounter; and the frantic cruelty of an Assembly, who have lost the equity of judges, the wisdom of legislators, the policy of statesmen, and the feelings of men; who know nothing of freedom but its extravagances, who teach philosophy the tone of fanaticism, and propagate liberty by persecution.

SUCH

* Louis XVI. was beheaded Jan. 21, 1793.

SUCH has been the end of innovation, even in an instance, where a very considerable reform had certainly been long and greatly wanted. Our circumstances are widely different. Let us beware then of their example; let us not court unnecessary dangers, nor rashly venture on that troubled sea, in which their hopes were shipwrecked. The consequences are before us. To provide against them is a duty we owe to Society and to ourselves. It remains only, that we unite in our conduct the moderation, which Religion teaches, with the firmness, which the occasion demands; that in defending ourselves, we remember the charity we owe to our brethren; and in guarding the public, the respect, which is due to its laws. The object, we ought to aim at, is not superiority but security, not punishment but prevention. *Let us therefore earnestly follow after those things,*
which

which make for peace *. *Let us fear God and the King, and meddle not with them, that are given to change* †. And if we be called on to act or to suffer, let it be, on the post of duty, in the support of order, and in the defence of our best inheritance, the Religion and Constitution of our country.

* Rom. xiv. 19.

† Prov. xxiv. 21.





ERRATA

Page 10. l. 5. *for* dimifs, *read* difmifs.

13. l. 8. eye-witnefs, *r.* eye-witneffes.

20. l. 4. the empire, *r.* as it fhews the empire.

21. l. 3. few approve, *r.* few can approve.

25. l. 16. lifts, *r.* tests.

112. l. 6. run, *r.* rufh.

130. l. 6. fore, *r.* forego-

193. l. 15. of one, *r.* of the one.

296. l. 13. great, *r.* greateft.



